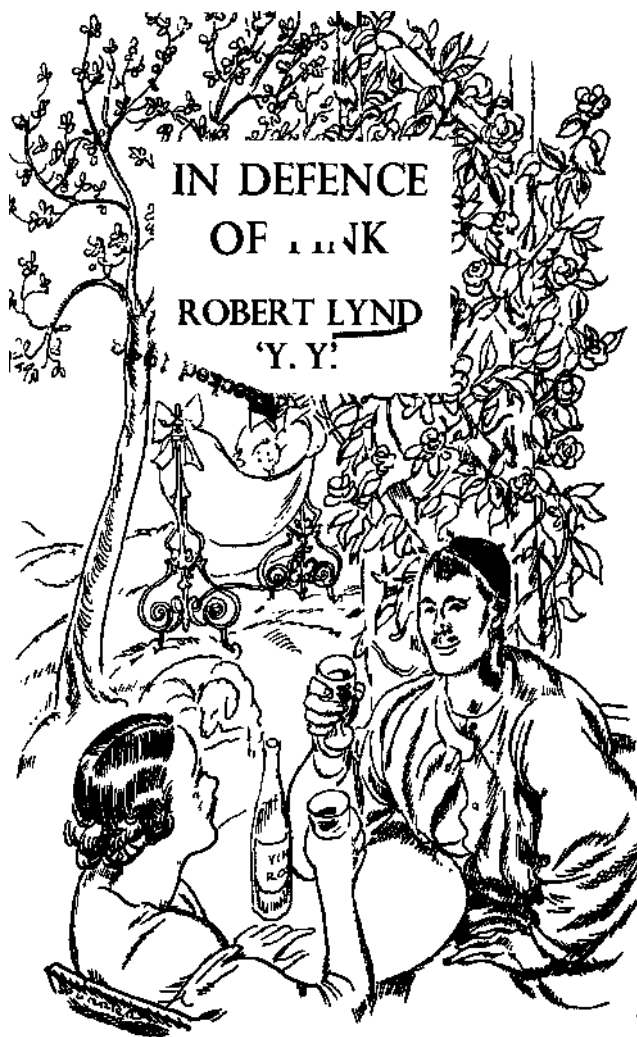


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I. IN DEFENCE OF PINK

IN his last book of essays, *As I was Saying*, Mr G. K. Chesterton makes the admirable suggestion that, now that so many people express their political opinions by wearing coloured shirts, shirts of various shades of colour ought also to be manufactured. This would provide a means of self-expression for those who are only 'Rather Nazi or Not Quite Communist.' The Rather Nazi 'might express his doubts by having his new brown shirt fade faintly into the old field-grey.' After putting forward this very sensible proposal, unfortunately, Mr Chesterton makes an exception as regards pink. He

would allow no pink shirts to be put on the market. A pink shirt to him, it is clear, is as a red rag to a bull. He denounces pink in such terms as no colour surely has ever been denounced in before. 'Pink,' he says, 'seems to me the essentially false and negative colour ; because it is the dilution of something that is rich and glowing or nothing. . . . Pink suggests nothing but the horrible and blasphemous idea of wine with too much water in it. Pink is the withering of the rose and the fading of the fire ; pink is mere anaemia in the blood of the universe.'

As a lover of pink I cannot let this pass without a protest. Pink is a colour that mankind, or the English-speaking part of it, instinctively choose as the symbol of perfection. We speak not only of 'the pink of perfection,' but of 'the pink of fashion,' or 'the pink of elegance.' Many a soldier, writing from the Front, kept up the spirits of his wife and children by signing his letter: 'Yours in the pink.' Mr Chesterton, if he had been censor, would presumably have crossed this out and substituted: 'Yours in the blues.' Then there is the pink of the huntsman—a misnomer, perhaps, but this merely proves how deeply men of heroic mould reverence the colour. And how could any

one fail to reverence the colour in a world in which year after year spring announces her arrival in the pink of the almond blossom, and summer her arrival in the pink of the wild rose. 'Pink,' says Mr Chesterton, 'is the withering of the rose.' On the contrary, it is the colour of the true, the original, rose—the rose that bloomed in the Garden of Eden. The rose did not turn red till after Adam sinned. Pink, again, is the loveliest colour of the carnation: deeper shades are vulgar in comparison with it. In the years in which I used often to be still awake at dawn, what an entrancing spectacle were the pink clouds in the eastern sky! And what child is there who has not been entranced by the echo of that colour in the lustrous hollows of shells? It is no wonder that parents choose pink and blue as the two perfect colours with which to decorate the cradles of their adored infants—bows of pink ribbon for a girl, bows of blue for a boy. There is no colour in nature to surpass it. Even in the matter of wine, pink calls up the image not of watered claret, but of that charming-looking, if not so charming-tasting, wine, *vin rosé*. Pink the colour of anaemia in the blood? Why, it is the colour of health among the so-called white

racess, who, as has often been pointed out, are really the pink races—at least, the one that has painted the map pink is.

I can honestly say that, in my opinion, the best thing that could happen to the world would be that it should become pinker and pinker. I should feel much happier about Nature herself if I were told that she was gradually turning pink in tooth and claw. If we must have revolutions, I should prefer pink revolutions to red revolutions., As a child, I was afraid of the Scarlet Woman: if I could have thought of her as the Pink Woman, I should have rather liked her.) I certainly prefer people whose sins are pink to those whose sins are scarlet. There is too much red in the world. J do not know whether any nation at present flies a pink flag, but I have a notion that pink will be the colour of the international flag when the war-drum throbs no longer. Those who agree with Mr Chesterton may not join in the chorus, but how rapturously the rest of us, from Tokio to Vancouver, will sing—nay, roar—our anthem, *Keep the Pink Flag Flying!*

Mr Chesterton's hatred of pink, I imagine, is largely the result of his having been born in a country that has worked extremism out of its

system. The beauties of moderation are conspicuous only in a world of immoderate men. The moderate man is apt to congratulate himself on his moderation—to become smug. And, when one meets a man who is not only moderate but smug, one cannot help wishing that he would get rid of his moderation as a means of getting rid of his smugness. (As a matter of fact, smugness is not confined to the moderate: it is equally common among the extremists, the heretics, and the unconventional.) Still, there is something very revolting in the smugness of a man who is both moderate and successful, and moderate men have an unpleasant way of being successful. At the same time, consider what a world we should be living in if the majority of people had not learned the art of being moderate. The temperate man may at times seem dull, but how infinitely boring, in nine cases out of ten, is the drunkard! A happy marriage of give-and-take may seem flat, but the more passionate life of a wife-beater or a husband-slapper is in the end even more tedious. Immoderate people are exciting to read about, but who would send his son to be educated by one of them? We do not glorify immoderate bank-managers or immoderate doctors. In nearly

all our relations in life, we like people to be pink. We say of so-and-so: 'He 's a white man,' but what we really mean is: 'He 's a pink man'—a man pinker than ourselves, and so to be trusted.

It is obviously, however, in political rather than in moral matters that Mr Chesterton abhors pinkness. 'There is,' he says, 'a merely pink humanitarianism which I dislike even more than the real Red Communism. It is not so honest: it is not so genuinely angry or so justly angry; and it is ultimately every bit as negative and destructive of the strong colours and definite shapes of any great historical culture. It will not weaken civilization the less because it is too watery to burn it in a night: for you cannot set fire to a town with pink torches or pink artillery. This cold and colourless sentimentalism none the less threatens the world like a slow and crawling Deluge.' As a pink humanitarian I read these words with a lively concern. I have grown pinker and pinker with the years, but I had always thought until now that, little good though I could do, I was at least—in political matters—harmless. I have never blinded myself to the fact that in politics I am a wobbling sentimentalist, but, as I have never had a vote except in a strong Tory con-

stituency, I have comforted myself with the reflection that I could do no injury to my fellows. At times, I have even become self-satisfied — smug, if you prefer it — in my pinkness. I have said to myself: 'If only everybody were as pink as I, all this nonsense in the world would end in a week. If only everybody wobbled like me, how well everybody would get on together!' Many people, when they see a statesman wobbling, lose confidence in him. That is the moment at which I, on the contrary, renew my trust in him. I like to see a Conservative statesman a bit of a Liberal, a Liberal statesman a bit of a Conservative, and a Socialist statesman a bit of both. I should trust Mussolini and Hitler more if they occasionally wobbled. 'It is their deathlike rigidity that appals me. Oh, for a few pink corpuscles flowing through their veins! How much better a time the Abyssinians and the Jews would have!

Possibly, my love of a blending, a moderation, of colours is due to the fact that I grew up in a country in which the political colours were, in Mr Chesterton's phrase, 'rich and glowing.' In the Ireland of my youth, orange was not permitted to be blended with green, and green was not perceptibly diluted with orange. At the

same time, there were visionaries who looked forward to the day on which these colours would be miraculously interfused, I am not a painter and do not know what is the result when green is mixed with orange, but I should not be surprised to learn that it was pink. The Irish Free State has not gone so far as to fly a pink flag, but it has at least abandoned the pure green flag, and made room for a strip of orange united to a strip of green by a white band of peace. This is surely an example of pinkness in politics—which is disquieting, perhaps, to the extremist, but is inspiring to me. It is a symbol of compromise, and compromise seems to me the third most beautiful thing that ever came out of the soul of man. If I love pink, it is probably because it is the colour of compromise and so the colour of hope. It is not for nothing that Nature brings in spring with the almond blossom and summer with the wild rose. Here Nature is our schoolmaster, bidding us dilute our angry red if we would enter into a world of sunshine. That is why my whole political philosophy may be summed up in the phrase : ' Strike me pink.' And, in my dreams of the future of the world, my profoundest hopes might be expressed in the phrase : ' Strike all the world pink!'

II. WE IN DURAND GARDENS

'WE in Durand Gardens,' writes an indignant householder to a morning newspaper, 'know what Socialism really means. Recently the L.C.C. renumbered the properties in spite of a 100 per cent petition against their interference. (The confusion caused was disgraceful, a real Russian bit of tyranny.'

How warmly one sympathizes with this cry from the heart! What suffering did Prometheus on the rock endure that can be compared with the suffering of a citizen robbed of his familiar house number? I know myself what it is to have my telephone number stolen and another and inferior number substituted for it. Life under Stalin is nothing to the persecution that ensues. All day long and all night long the friends of the beautiful actress whose number I have been given keep ringing and refusing to believe that I am living in my own house. I have known a woman to ring up three times within five minutes and insist that the actress must be in the house as this was her number. I could not deny that according to any decent code of ethics the number belonged to the

actress and that in accepting it from the Post Office I was in a measure a receiver of stolen goods. At the same time, I accepted it under duress, and I felt that the woman's hot-tempered remarks should have been addressed to the Post Office and not to me. Government departments never have, never had, and never will have a conscience. That is why here, as in Russia and in Germany, they steal our telephone numbers and anything else they can lay their hands on.

I doubt whether the Government in any country realizes how deeply the ordinary citizens resent being interfered with in any way at all. We do not much mind the authorities interfering with other people, but we have the strongest objection to their interfering with ourselves.) I remember how, when I was a boy living in an 'avenue' in which every house had some such name as Viewmount or Altona, many of the residents objected strongly to an official order that their houses must be given numbers, even if they retained their names as well. It seemed like branding respectable houses as a kind of architectural convicts. After all, a name is part of a personality, and the personality of Chatsworth is half gone when postmen

and milkmen begin to speak of it as number seven. I was once myself the occupant of a little semi-detached villa which its first owner had proudly christened Belgrave House. I



PERSONALITY OF CHATS WORTH HALF GONE

sometimes wish that I had allowed the name to be painted on the pillars of the gate, as the house-painter proposed, but I shrank from the responsibility of living in a house so nobly named. That was cowardice — a snobbish avoidance of snobbery. I do not see why houses should not have names as cats and dogs have.

Who could care for a cat that, instead of having a name, was known as number twenty-eight? Even race-horses, though they carry numbers for the sake of convenience, reach our hearts and imaginations only through their names—Victor Wild, Brown Jack, Hyperion.

On the other hand, the letter from the householder in Durand Gardens suggests that even a number may come to have profound personal associations—that a man who has lived happily for years in 84B will feel deeply humiliated if his house is renumbered 49. Many people associate their luck with numbers and feel gloomy about their future if they are linked with a number the digits of which add up to thirteen. But, even apart from this, they resent any compulsory change in the street in which they live. The inhabitants of Keats Grove in Hampstead protested bitterly when the London County Council altered the name of the street from the original John Street. They had, so far as I am aware, no animus against Keats: they simply resented interference with the name of their street. It was, as they saw clearly, the thin end of the wedge. The thick end of the wedge has now reached Durand Gardens.

At the same time, it seems to me that the

Durand Gardens householder has misread his history if he imagines that Russian tyranny is a new thing in English life, due to the rise of the Labour Party. There have always, alas! been Bolsheviks in England, compelling the citizen to do all kinds of things, whether he wished to do them or not. The Bolsheviks of the seventeenth century compelled him to go to church on Sunday. That was almost as gross an interference with the rights of the subject as the renumbering of the houses in Durand Gardens. Worse was still to come in the eighteenth century when the Englishman was compelled to reveal facts about his family and himself in a census paper. Some people objected to this on religious grounds, believing that to number the people would be to call down the wrath of God on England; but the Bolsheviks then in power cared little for the conscientious scruples of their fellow-subjects. 'Britons,' a poet had sung, 'never shall be slaves,' but on this occasion they responded like slaves to the whip of their masters.

Then came that crowning act of Bolshevism—the imposition of the income tax. The freedom-loving Englishman now found the Government prying into his most private affairs,

Hitherto the amount of money he possessed was known only to himself, his bank manager, and God. Now it was public property, and not only was he compelled to disgorge the facts about his income, but to disgorge a large part of his income to the tyrants then in authority.

I do not know when all this business of compulsion and interference began, but there is no denying that it had a long, dark history before it culminated in the renumbering of the houses in Durand Gardens) There was a time when an ordinary poor citizen in a coast town might suddenly be seized and sent off, willy-nilly, to serve in the Navy. 'Well,' he may have consoled himself at the time, 'at least, they didn't make me change the number of my house, as they might do if I were living under a despotism.' In most troubles there is some consoling circumstance. Even in Durand Gardens the residents may comfort themselves with the reflection that their protest against the renumbering of their houses will not be regarded (as it might be in another country I could name) as an act of Trotskyite Fascism.

Still, it is painfully evident that the lust for interference has been growing in official circles

at a rapid rate during the present century. Mr Lloyd George's Insurance Act was a characteristic example of the modern tyranny, breaking up the old sacred relationship between employer and servant, and compelling duchesses to feats of stamp-licking from which African slaves would have shrunk in despair. Again, I am not allowed to possess a motor-car without a prying Government's insisting on knowing all about it—its make, its horse-power, even its colour—and I am forced to pay not only for the right to possess it and the right to drive it, but for the insurance of pedestrians who may involve me in an accident against the results of their folly. I have never been able to see what business it is of the Government's whether I own a car or not, or by what right they compel me to carry a number-plate, however much I may dislike it. One expects such things in Russia; but Englishmen are always boasting that theirs is a free country. So far as I can see, unhappily, about the only freedom that is left to the modern Englishman is the freedom to possess a cat without telling the police about it. And, if the Labour Party gets into power, even that may go.

The dog—that essential adjunct of the noblest

type of Englishman—has already for generations been spied upon by the Nosy Parkers of the police force. The Government, it is true, does not yet interfere with the name of your dog or compel him to carry a rear-lamp or reflector. But the fact remains that if an Englishman keeps a dog and says nothing about it, the authorities, like the secret police in Russia, swoop down on him and hale him before the magistrates for punishment. You are not allowed to keep even a wireless set, except on terms laid down by the Government. Implicit obedience to an interfering Government is the universal rule in modern life. Go on ignoring the authorities, as you would if you were living in a free country, and you will find yourself in jail.

Fortunately, the Englishman has still one right left—the right to complain. 'We in Durand Gardens' are not yet forbidden to call our masters what they are—Russians and tyrants—when they change the numbers of our houses against our will. I should myself have been inclined to go further than the resident in Durand Gardens in the circumstances and to call the L.C.C. a gang of thugs. There is no need to be mealy-mouthed in speaking about the L.C.C. This is not Russia—yet.

III. SADISM IN THE NURSERY

A RESEARCH professor has been lecturing on Lewis Carroll to the American Psycho-Analytic Association. It is difficult to say whether the lecture was intended to be a leg-pull or not. There is so much written and spoken nowadays that looks like leg-pulling and yet turns out to be meant quite seriously. All I know is that the New York correspondent of a London newspaper took the lecture at its face-value and sent a column report of it to his editor. I do not mean to say that he took the lecture seriously, but that he was obviously convinced that the lecturer seriously meant what he said.

I myself doubted this before I had finished the first paragraph. The statement that Lewis Carroll suffered from 'preponderant oral sadistic tendencies of a cannibalistic character' sounds, I admit, scientific, but it also sounds like a parody of scientific pronouncement. If I had not read so many scientific pronouncements that sounded like parodies, I should not hesitate

for a moment to place the professor among the parodists. I feel fairly sure, however, that, whether he was pulling the legs of his audience or not, many members of it left the hall at the end observing to each other that the lecture gave one furiously to think. They had been told, for example, that all Alice's adventures were an 'expression of enormous anxiety' on Lewis Carroll's part. These anxieties often 'seemed to refer back to severe deprivations in eating and drinking' during childhood. 'Alice does not get anything to eat at the mad tea-party.'

That seems convincing enough, does it not? A writer invents a child who gets nothing to eat at a party: therefore he has inherited from his own childhood an anxiety neurosis about food. We can explain nearly everything in these days, and that sounds as rational an explanation as most. I have never read a life of Lewis Carroll, so that I do not know anything about his childhood, but we may deduce from the story of the mad tea-party that he was underfed in the nursery, especially since, on various grounds, the professor suggests that 'Lewis Carroll never got the full love of his parents.'

It is certainly a loveless world that we find depicted in *Alice*—a queer world, as the professor says, 'without real love, in which kings and queens are either absurd or cruel or both.' Cruelty is a recurrent theme throughout the stories. 'For instances of cruelty he cited the Queen of Hearts, who wants to chop off everybody's head. There is a serious discussion whether one can cut off the head of a Cheshire cat when the head appears without a body.' And he concluded: 'We may surely ask whether such literature might not increase the destructive attitude of children beyond the measure which is desirable.' He himself commended *Mother Goose* as a better book for the young on the ground that it contains 'much less of the element of destructiveness.'

On this point, I may say, I cannot agree with him. Has he not heard of the various efforts made by humanitarians in recent years to get *Mother Goose* bowdlerized of all its cruelties and zoophobias so as to make it fit to be placed in the hands of a modern child? I venture to say that there is more cruelty to the page in *Mother Goose* than in a biography of Henry VIII. What kind of sadistic monster, one wonders, can it have been who wrote *Sing*

a Song of Sixpence, with its heartless closing verse :

The maid was in the garden
Hanging out the clothes,
Down came a blackbird
And pecked off her nose.

Whence came this mad craving for the personal disfigurement of a fellow-creature? Can it be that in early childhood the author had been ill-treated by a housemaid when his mother was not looking and had grown up harbouring thoughts of revenge, never to be expressed till he had acquired the art of verse? I confess I do not see why the vindictive passions of a thwarted child should be broadcast in the English nursery.

Equally cruel is the quatrain in which children are accustomed to reproach each other for telling tales. Custom enables us to gloss over much of the cruelty in these nursery rhymes ; but, read in cold blood, what could exceed the horror of:

Tell tale, tit!
Your tongue shall be slit,
And all the dogs in the town
Shall have a little bit.

Better surely to teach little children to gloat

over the tortures of the Star Chamber or the story of the death of Jezebel than to encourage them in such an *orgy* of revenge on a brother or sister who has merely told the truth about a raid on the larder. Even the Grand Guignol has never dared to stage such a scene as is represented in this seemingly light-hearted and harmless nursery rhyme.

Children, of course, are notoriously cruel. Not the children we know, perhaps, but the children we hear about. Even this cruelty, however, most of us have explained away as being not cruel, but merely experimental, in intention. I have heard of a boy's placing a star-ypointing pin on a seat on which another boy would sooner or later sit down; and I have always excused him on the ground that he did not want to hurt the other boy but merely to observe how the other boy would react to an unexpected sting from an upturned pin; The more profoundly I study nursery rhymes, however, the more convinced I become that children have an extremely hearty appetite for the sufferings of their fellow-creatures. To them it is a laughing matter that the three wise men of Gotham who went to sea in a bowl were drowned. They are not moved to sympathy

but to mirth when they read that the man in the moon who came tumbling down and asked his way to Norwich—

**Went by the south,
And burnt his mouth.
With supping cold pease-porridge.**

Children's enjoyment of this rhyme may be defended on the ground that it is enjoyment of nonsense, but to me it seems that it is the phrase, 'burnt his mouth,' that creates most pleasure in the nursling's breast.

Hearty delight in the misfortunes of others, whether human or of the dumb creation—this seems to be the dominant note in nursery poetry. Simple Simon becomes a laughing-stock because he has not a penny with which to buy a coveted pie. The story of Tom, the piper's son who stole a pig, is popular chiefly because it ends with an account of the sufferings of Tom:

**The pig was eat, and Tom was beat,
And Tom went roaring down the street.**

As for the little man who had a little gun, has not all the sadism of the addicts of blood-sports gone to his making? If he had not deprived the duck of its life would he ever have been an

object of admiration in the nursery? Even Doctor Foster, probably a clergyman, is not spared the ribald laughter of the young. The fact that on his way to Gloucester *he stepped* in a puddle right up to his middle,' must have been a cause of intense distress and humiliation to him; but children do not mind that; they merely thank their stars that they have been born into a world in which such things happen.

I do not wish to suggest that children are entirely absorbed in thoughts of cruelty; but I do contend that pleasure in the misfortunes both of human beings and animals plays a disproportionate part in their imaginative life. They are glad that the Old Woman who Lived in a Shoe whipped her unfortunate children. They are glad that the farmer's wife cut off the tails of the three blind mice. They are glad that Mother Hubbard's dog was disappointed of his bone. They are glad that Jack fell down and broke his crown and that Jill came tumbling after. They are glad that the old man who would not say his prayers was taken by the left leg and thrown down the stairs.

The story of the old woman with the crooked sixpence who bought the pig that would not

go over the stile is one long accumulation of horrors, even if the horrors are finally undone:

The cat began to kill the rat;
The rat began to gnaw the rope;
The rope began to hang the butcher;
The butcher began to kill the ox . . .
The stick began to beat the dog;
The dog began to bite the pig. . . .

What images to conjure up in the mind of a child! Surely, even Lewis Carroll in his most cannibalistic moments never approached the sadistic exuberance of Mother Goose. Mother Goose has all the worst characteristics of Lewis Carroll, except, perhaps, his schizophrenia. I trust the American professor will turn his attention to her, and after turning it, will turn the far too fascinating old witch out of every progressive nursery.



IV. IS IT NOT TIME?

'I REALIZE,' said Mr Runciman lately, 'that there is an amount of latitude in language granted to bargees which is not granted to others.' If I had been a bargee, I should have been pleased on reading that. I should have said to myself: 'Evidently bargees are popular, since in their choice of language they are given most-favoured-nation treatment.' And, even if I did not wish to use bad language myself, I should like to be granted the liberty to use it. Not so the bargees, if we may judge from a letter written by an ex-bargee to a great newspaper. His letter began: 'Is it not time that . . .' and went on to say that bargees were utterly sick of being regarded as star performers in bad language and that the campaign of vilifying as respectable and pure-lipped a body of men as ever breathed on water must stop. One gathered that the conversation of bargees was invariably carried on in language that would not

have brought a blush to the cheek of the little cottage girl in 'We are Seven.' Men with healthy minds in healthy bodies, they are sticklers for the purity of the King's English, and not even the most clean-lipped curate has the right to throw a stone at them.

I confess that I have never heard a bargee swearing. I have simply taken for granted that contact with water in almost any form leads to the use of bad language. It has always been regarded as impossible even to sell fish without using bad language. Think what a reputation Billingsgate has, merely because of its associations with the sea. (One of the most cherished convictions of the ordinary man is that in order to qualify as a fishwife a woman must have on the tip of her tongue words that the ordinary man would not use even in delirium.) Here, again, I will make a confession: I have again and again stood close to women who were selling fish, and never have I heard one of them swear. (If you ask them the price of turbot, they reply in language that would not disgrace the lips of a Sunday-school mistress. Can it be that next to bargees fishwives are really the most respectable and chaste-lipped of the world's workers? Have we been all these years lazily

perpetuating a libel on some of the noblest representatives of womanly womanliness this sea-girt isle has known?

It is difficult to say. I cannot lightly give up my theory that there is some essential connection between bad language and water or the denizens of water. What, for example, about admirals? Are they, too, like bargees, impeccable of speech? Even Gilbert, who was a Conservative, did not go so far as to say that. The only evidence that we have had on the matter in recent years came out in a sensational naval scandal, in the course of which an admiral was alleged to have addressed a subordinate in words which could be represented in the press only as-----and----- . For weeks all England was asking all England what exactly the admiral said when he said----- . Was it-----or-----? I said I thought it was-----, basing my opinion on the feeling that, if it had been only-----, the papers would have printed the word in full. I forget whether the identity of the missing word was finally established or not. But I remember that we were all agreed at the time that, whatever the shortcomings of the Navy might be, at least it was not mealy-mouthed.

But we do not need to go to the Navy in order to find evidence of the close relationship between strong language and water. We need only open Boswell's *Johnson* to discover that the gently gliding Thames itself is the mother of ribald speech. However prim of speech on dry land, the Londoner of those days could not apparently go out a few yards on the water without acquiring a vocabulary of which on his return to land he must have been rather ashamed. 'It is well known,' says Boswell, 'that there was formerly a rude custom for those who were sailing upon the Thames to accost each other, as they passed, in the most abusive language they could invent, generally, however, with as much satirical humour as they were capable of producing.' You will remember how "Johnson himself was affected by the aqueous atmosphere when he went on the river. 'Johnson,' says Boswell, 'was once eminently successful in this species of contest; a fellow having attacked him with some coarse raillery, Johnson answered him thus: "Sir, your wife, under pretence of keeping a bawdy-house, is a receiver of stolen goods." ' That was pretty good for an elderly philosopher who, when on dry land, was such an enemy of strong language

that he reproved a man severely for referring to someone as a 'damned fool.' Watery influences are difficult to resist. We see in the new edition of Boswell's *Tour* how the sea-air of the Hebrides excited Dr Johnson to a grossness of speech of which he would have strongly disapproved in Gough Square.

Can we, then, believe that bargees, alone among the travellers by sea and by river, are immune from the linguistic influences of water? Mr W. W. Jacobs certainly quotes very little bad language in the conversation of his river-goers, but he seems to me again and again to suggest that his characters are using the most horrible language. If he does not repeat it, it is because he is too good an artist to think that a verbatim report is a work of imaginative art.

The only thing that makes me doubt whether bargees are experts in violent language is the fact that nearly all the popular generalizations that I know about classes, trades, and professions are, so far as my experience goes, false. Take, for example, that admirable phrase: 'As drunk as a lord.'⁵ How cheering it is to the heart of a true democrat! Immediately one thinks of Lord Salisbury, Lord Passfield, and Lord Snell as members of a privileged

night-club, wearing their coronets atilt at a prolonged bottle-party. Yet what an illusion this turns out to be when one visits the House of Lords during a debate! Here we find collected the soberest body of men—apart, perhaps from bargees—in England. Not a bottle produced in the course of a whole sitting; not a single drunken interruption; not even a tipsy giggle. Truly, if I were a peer, I should feel tempted to write to *The Times* a letter beginning: 'Is it not time that-----,' protesting against the repetition of a cruel, if thoughtless, reflection on the behaviour of the aristocracy.

Is it not time, too, to protest against the continued use of 'attorney' as a word of abuse? It is true that the word has not been so popular in an abusive sense since a Welsh attorney became 'the man who won the War.' But it is sure to be revived again as soon as another attorney proves himself too clever for his political opponents. In view of the certainty of this revival, I should like to ask why people go on consulting solicitors, if they are all crooks. It seems to me that peers, solicitors, and bargees should unite in organizing a Society for the Protection of Respectable People from Proverbial Malignity.

Such a society would undoubtedly recruit many members from the Jesuits. For they, too, are proverbially represented as cunning, unscrupulous jugglers with words — worldly atheists in Christians' clothing. If you think of an unanswerable argument in the course of a debate, someone is sure to call you a Jesuit. For unanswerability in debate is regarded by your opponents) as something devilish. Yet nearly all the Jesuits I have met have been charming, cultured, frank, good-natured men, much less given to controversy than the people who are always calling other people Jesuits.-

Then there are plumbers and their mates. What calumnies have been spread about these useful members of the community, without whose constant services life in a modern city would be unbearable! I have often wondered at the patience of plumbers under an incessant fusillade of insults. They, too, should be large subscribers to the funds of the S.P.R.P.P.M.

Even some of the lower animals might well claim the protection of the society. For they also have been grossly maligned. They cannot speak for themselves, but the various societies of animal-lovers might speak for them. What right have we human beings to go on using such

expressions as 'drunken dog,' 'drunken swine,' and 'drinks like a fish'? We know perfectly well at the bottom of our hearts that the dog and the pig are models of abstinence, and that, whatever a fish is doing when it opens its mouth, it is not making away with the better part of a bottle of whisky. Yet we libel these creatures as heartlessly as we libel those highly intelligent creatures, the goose and the ass, which we choose to regard as (embodiments of stupidity . Is it not time that all this mud-slinging at bargees, peers, and our dumb friends—too dumb, alas, even to engage, like Dr Johnson, in ribald repartee—stopped? I for one am strongly in favour of overhauling proverbial expressions in the interest of truth and common decency. I do not for a moment believe that my hatter is mad, and I will allow no one to call him so. Let us have a truce to such libels. The things people say about other people and the lower animals are enough to make one swear like a trooper.

V. CHRISTIAN NAMES

I WAS told the other day of a lady, just dead, who had been called Alma after the battle of that name, fought in the same year in which she was born. It was the first time I had ever heard of anybody with a pretty name who had been called after a battle. How fortunate she was in comparison with all those Ladysmith Mafeking Kimberley Joneses who were born during the Boer War! Even the last war produced few names of battles that could be regarded as beautiful: I can think only of Caporetto as a name that might decorate a hero of romance.

How many children are grateful to their parents for the names given them in baptism? I have known a girl to complain bitterly of having been called Dorcas, not because the name itself is ugly, but because its Hebrew form is Tabitha. Dorcas, I see in Mr Eric Partridge's *Name This Child*, means 'gazelle,' and has, therefore, the most charming associations. I do not know whether Arnold Bennett resented his having been given Enoch as his first name: he

certainly dropped it in later life. In an age in which the reading of the Bible is no longer universal, many Biblical names have come to sound exotic and even faintly ridiculous. To some people they always sounded faintly ridiculous, and I remember regarding a boy at school as half a foreigner simply because he was called Ebenezer. I do not think the cult of Biblical names was ever so general among the Puritans of Scotland and Ireland as among the Puritans of England. It would have been impossible in the Ireland of my youth to find anybody with a name like Israel Kneebone. In England, however, Hepzibah—signifying 'My delight in her'—was once common enough, and even Meheta-bel—meaning, perhaps, 'How good is God!'—remained popular in the nineteenth century. Most civilized parents would now think that, in giving such names to their children, they were perpetrating a ghastly joke. I imagine few Obadiah's were christened last year in England. Uriah probably died with Uriah Heap, and the Abimelechs are no more. Among the obsolete or obsolescent Biblical names mentioned by Mr Partridge I find Ananias. With what motive, I wonder, did parents ever brand a son with a name so in-

famous? Had they longed for a girl and wished to punish the child for being a boy? Or were they cynics who agreed with one of my school-masters that all boys are liars?

There are some people who believe that the name given to an infant exerts a powerful influence on its later life. Obviously, when American parents name their first-born son Homer they are filled with the hope that they have presented him with one of the first essentials of genius. It is in the same optimistic spirit that parents used to bestow the name Christian on their sons. I have known some of these Christians in their teens and I confess I could see few signs that the name had played any part in the moulding of their characters. The only instance I know of a name's being a pointer to the subsequent career of the boy who bore it is the unhappy Jabez Balfour. Did his father and mother, when they saddled him with that heavy-sounding name, realize that it meant 'sorrow'? And would he have had a happier fate if they had called him Isaac, which means 'laughter'? The change of names might conceivably have wrought a change of destinies. On the other hand, it might not.

It is certainly the case that most of the people

we know seem to be suitably named. Their names appear almost inevitable for people possessing just those features and those characters. I have scarcely a friend whom I can imagine being rightly described by any other name than his own. You will have observed the same thing in public life. Mr Stanley Baldwin simply had to be called Stanley Baldwin. Mr Ramsay MacDonald with any other name but Ramsay MacDonald would be sailing under false colours. A surname may be inappropriate—John Keats's for example—but a Christian name scarcely ever. There are people who hold that the more fitting part of Shelley's name was not his Christian name but his surname and that Mary Godwin showed an instinctive feeling for right nomenclature when on a famous occasion she addressed him not as 'Percy' but as 'Shelley.' I cannot help feeling, however, that Percy Bysshe Shelley is no bad description of the poet both in his life and in his work. It is the same with Algernon Charles Swinburne. At his greatest, he was undoubtedly Swinburne, but there was also a touch of Algernon. I see in *Name This Child* that the name Algernon 'has a slightly comic origin, for it means "whiskered," from the Norman *als gernons*, the

whiskered (man).' What name could be more expressive of the Victorian element in Swinburne's innocent desire to shock his contemporaries?



THE FIRST HERCULES I EVER KNEW

I have sometimes admired the courage of parents who give a son such a name as Hercules. To do so seems to be inviting the ridicule of fate. What if little Hercules should grow up to be a weedy weakling, a muff at games, an

unmuscular bookworm? But he never does. The first Hercules I ever knew was an enormous butcher. Parents are always right. Or nearly always.

The truth is, parents are seldom more in earnest than when choosing names for their babies; and in their intense earnestness they rise to prophetic heights of vision. There used to be parents with so little reverence for names that they would give their children not names but numbers, such as Tertius and Septimus. They were always in the minority, however, and they may be excused on the ground that they lived at a time when there were so many children that there were scarcely enough names to go round. The ordinary parent, on the other hand, took real trouble with names and, where possible, would try to bestow on his son a name that would equip him with the best qualities of some relative, preferably a rich one. Many a boy has found himself heir to a fortune simply because he was christened John or Alfred.

The one thing to which parents are mostly indifferent when naming a child is the essential beauty of the name. It is, no doubt, for aesthetic reasons that a number of girls are named Gladys and Gwendolen, but it is diffi-

cult to believe that it was love of beauty that ever led a father to call his son James or George, Thomas or Robert. There is a curiously prosaic quality in most boys' names, as though romance and poetry were unmanly. In our own time with its increasing population of Antonys and Michaels and Christophers there has been a slight tendency to more romantic nomenclature ; but even to-day how few are the parents who would have the courage to give a son the beautiful name, Hyacinth! How rare again is the noble name, Aloysius! The French are more daring with their Achille and Aristide, and from South Africa we had recently a bowler named Xenophdn; but Ulysses is reported to be dying out even in America. Hannibal, it is said, has always been a popular name in Cornwall; but I have never been lucky enough to meet a Hannibal in real life.

It was with some interest that I read through Mr Partridge's list of obsolete and obsolescent English names and tried to find one or two that might be worthy of revival. I confess I was disappointed in my search. Who would blast a boy's career by sending him out into the world called Herod? Who would subject him to the ridicule of his schoolmates by calling

him Hodaiah or Jehoiachim, Hutchin or Izod? Willibald and Winibald have little more to be said for them. Peredur and Vulfgar look more like telegraphic addresses than like the names of children. There is one use, however, to which some of these obsolete names might be put. Novelists in search of names for their characters which could not involve them in a libel action because no human beings with such names could conceivably exist, might join two of these forgotten names together—one as Christian name and one as surname—and bestow it on the chief character. No novelist would be in any danger in ascribing even the shadiest adventures to Mr Palafox Vulfnor. You might impute to Mr Vercingetorix Ricehard all the crimes in the company promoters' calendar and the most crooked-souled speculative solicitor would go libel-hunting through your pages in vain. Telemachus Walwine may sound like the name of a City man who had done more for the benefit of himself than of his fellow-creatures, but you will be able to tell the truth about him, for he does not exist. Then there is Banquo Hardwig, a lawyer deeply in debt because of his double life. In this list, indeed, there are enough names to permute

and combine to stock even a ten-and-sixpenny novel with characters.

I trust, however, no misguided antiquary will try to reintroduce any of these perished names into ordinary life. Among names, it is certain, it is mostly the fittest that have survived; and, with a declining birth-rate, we have no need to go ranging among such antiquities as Vigheard or Neot. Mr Vernon Bartlett has been complaining in *The Times* that too many Bartletts have been given the same Christian name as himself. But how would he like to have been called Zerubabel? Or Vulfherc? Parents, I repeat, are always right.

VI. MODERN FORMS OF STARVATION

IT is becoming more and more common to explain everything human beings do in terms of starvation or repression. People who go to the suburban cinemas, for example, are said to be suffering from emotional starvation. I met a man the other day who explained the comments of bishops on public occasions by the fact that they are suffering from sex starvation. He did not, it is true, offer any evidence in support of his statement. It was the modern sort of thing to say, and he simply took it for granted that it was true. The curious thing is that if my friend had actually met a bishop and said to him: 'Sir, you are suffering from sex starvation,' and the bishop had retorted, 'You, sir, are suffering from spiritual starvation,' my friend would have thought the bishop old-fashioned. According to each other, however, we all seem to be suffering from various forms of starvation human beings never suffered from before. We cannot even look at the hoardings without being faced by the question whether

we are suffering from night starvation, which is apparently the modern malady of maladies.

I am not sure that starvation is not too easy an explanation of human conduct and condition. Though not a teetotaller myself, I should be reluctant to accept as an explanation of Mr Bernard Shaw's intervention in the Abyssinian War the theory that he suffers from alcohol starvation. I do not believe that Mr Shaw has even a repressed desire for alcohol, and I doubt whether, if he drank half a bottle of Burgundy every evening with his dinner, his views on public affairs would be modified. I fancy a good deal of this talk about starvation is nonsense. It looks as if it meant something, and it means scarcely anything.

Take, for example, the theory that young people who go to see films are suffering from emotional starvation. What evidence is there that the cinema-goer of to-day is suffering from emotional starvation any more than the playgoer of the time of Euripides? People have loved acting and singing and dancing from an early period in the world's history, and they were interested in the loves of heroes and heroines many centuries before the invention of the cinema. I myself grew up in a world

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that did not contain a single cinema and I haunted the gallery of the theatre as persistently as any youth in his teens haunts the cinema to-day. Monday night found me in my seat, whether the play was good, bad, or indifferent: I preferred a bad or indifferent play to no play at all. Was this evidence of emotional starvation? It may have been, but a more rational explanation of my presence at the play seems to me to be that I was interested in the theatre, as I was interested in books, music, politics, cricket, farming, brands of tobacco, and the talk of my friends.

It is possible that all these interests might be explained as signs of starvation, but when an explanation becomes so universal as this it becomes meaningless. From what form of starvation, for example, are the crowds that go to see football matches on Saturday afternoons suffering? Is it emotional starvation or simply football starvation? I prefer to think of them as people who are not suffering from anything at all, but who happen to enjoy watching football. 'Ah, but,' it may be said, 'there must surely be something wrong with anybody who prefers watching a football match to listening to a Beethoven symphony or reading a psycho-

logical novel.' There is, I admit, always something wrong with other people's pleasures which we do not share, but may there not be something wrong with us in thinking there is something wrong with them?

Is it so certain that every spectator, except the most refined and intellectual spectator, in the cinema and the playing-field, is emotionally starving? Is there the slightest evidence to suggest that emotional starvation is any commoner among the admirers of Greta Garbo than among the admirers of Proust? Obviously, the two bodies are poles apart in taste, but, emotionally, I fancy the intellectual is just as likely to be found in a starving condition as the shop-girl. It may be argued that, whereas a Greta Garbo film introduces you to a world of make-believe, Proust introduces you to a world of reality. There is something in this argument, but at the same time it seems to me that the ordinary reader of Proust enjoys himself largely because he finds in him, not only psychological realism, but a world so strange as to be almost unreal—a world in which the imagination can indulge in make-believe as freely as in any cinema. Who can doubt that the pleasure the young take—or once took—in reading Baudelaire

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was in great measure the pleasure of indulging in make-believe? Baudelaire introduced them into a fairyland of strange sins: this was none the less so because the introduction was made in perfect literary form.

Not that the love of make-believe is itself a proof of emotional starvation. Rather it is a means of emotional fulfilment. It begins in the nursery with *Cinderella* and *Beauty and the Beast*, and it continues as long as men can enjoy the imaginative arts. It is an element in our enjoyment of *Hamlet* and *Paradise Lost*, of the *Messiah* and of the paintings of El Greco. Some people despise the indulgence in make-believe as a form of 'escape,' but it is an 'escape' only in the sense in which one may be said to escape when one leaves one's house in a Sussex village for a walk on the downs. One is not, in fact, escaping at all (unless there happens to be a disagreeable guest in the house) : one is simply doing what one wants-to do most—enjoying a walk on the downs.

Not, of course, that I deny the existence of emotional and other kinds of starvation ; but I distrust facile generalizations about them. What kind of starvation, for example, are solvers of crossword puzzles suffering from? Some people

would reply, 'Intellectual starvation,' but that reply would obviously be wrong, since among the solvers are to be found some of the brightest intellects of the age. The plain fact is, people solve crossword puzzles, not because they are in a state of starvation, but because they enjoy solving crossword puzzles. It is the same with playing golf or backgammon or taking an interest in cricket. And it is the same, I contend, with going to the cinema. If the cinema audiences are suffering from anything in particular, indeed, I should say that it is, not emotional starvation, but emotional repletion. "I came lately on what was to me a new form of starvation, which is referred to in Major Yeats-Brown's book, *Lancer At Large*. Here Major Yeats-Brown quotes a lady who explained to him that the Indian terrorists should not be called terrorists, but that they should simply be regarded as young married men who have been starved of romance. She did not use the phrase 'romance starvation,' but I do not think I am doing her an injustice in saying that this was her explanation of the activities of the terrorists. 'As a matter of fact,' she said, 'sex has a lot to do with their going off the rails. They marry early, and they don't have any

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experience of love and courtship in the European sense, for their wives are chosen for them. There 's no suspense or romance about their love-affairs. Many of them have had a large family before they are out of their 'teens. By the time they are twenty; they have had a glut of marriage and family life. But they 're passionate. From what my friends have told me, they 're the most passionate people on the face of the earth. They have to have some outlet.' Strange that a man should go out and throw bombs simply because he has a wife and family who do not fulfil his need for romance! It may be true that an unromantic housewife turns an occasional husband to thoughts of bomb-throwing. But, on the other hand, we must admit that the marriage of convenience has resulted in extraordinarily little bomb-throwing in France. We must also admit that, among the most efficient organizers of bomb-throwing and gunmanship in modern Europe have been many happily married men and men who were not married at all. The starvationist school of psychology, no doubt, would explain that all these terrorists, whether in Europe or in India, were suffering from one form of starvation or another—sex starvation, emotional starvation,

or romance starvation. I do not believe it. I believe that all that they were suffering from was the illusion that the best and quickest way to bring a perfect world into being was to bomb and shoot the upper dog and his large and unpleasant family.

No, I do not believe that the starvation theory explains either the ordinary bomb-thrower or the ordinary bishop. It may explain a bomb-thrower here and there and a bishop here and there; but the ordinary bishop or bomb-thrower, it seems to me, is misled, in so far as he is misled, simply by a dream of perfection. And may not the same thing be said of the ordinary cinema-goer? Is not he—or she—too, dreaming of perfection—the perfect love, the perfect sacrifice, the perfect surroundings, the perfect he-man, the perfect goddess? Vulgar, perhaps, but there is no evidence of starvation in it. One might as well say that women and children who munch sweetmeat's are starving. They 're not.

VII. SALUTE!

IT is reported that a new 'democratic salute' has been invented in the Argentine. The salute consists in raising both hands joined above the head. This is said to symbolize opposition alike to Fascism and to Communism. I should have thought myself that a still better salute would have been the hands-up of submission. If men get accustomed to submit to each other in time of peace, they would be much less likely ever to have to submit in war. For war would be extremely improbable on a planet on which everybody was constantly professing his readiness to submit to everybody else. Universal mutual submission—what more honourable ideal could be set before the nations? Initiate this, and we shall have a world fit for children to grow up in. The new spirit, of course, would not apply to cricket and football. Even here, however, I think it would not be a bad thing if both teams lined up before and after the match and exchanged gestures of mutual submission. It would remind the players if but for a moment

that *sub specie aeternitatis* even cricket or football is only a game.

As for the new democratic salute, it seems to me to be too like gymnastic exercises to be suitable for universal use. We who are middle-aged and stiffening in the joints should find it an arduous business going about the streets if every time we met a friend we had to perform a kind of strenuous physical jerks. Of course, if the Argentine Government, like the British, is set on improving the physical fitness of the nation, the middle-aged and stiff must be prepared to suffer. But if physical fitness is to be taken into account in devising the ideal salute, would it not be much better if, when two friends met in the street, each had to stoop and, without bending his knees, touch his toes with his fingers? There is something to be said, indeed, for a still more health-giving salute which would consist in lying on the back on the pavement and making circular movements in the air with the legs. A few months of this, and there would not be a corpulent stock-broker left in the City.

It may be thought that salutations of this kind would bring the custom of saluting into disrepute. But this is not so, As Isaac D'Israeli points out

in his *Curiosities of Literature*, many of the present salutations of the human race are 'incommodious and painful.' 'It requires,' he declares, 'great practice to enable a man to be polite in an island situated in the straits of The Sound. Houtman tells us they saluted him in this grotesque manner: "They raised his left foot, which they passed gently over the right leg, and from thence over the face." ' If this sort of thing were general in Europe, we should all have to take a course of Delsarte in order to acquire the necessary suppleness. Consider, again, a popular form of salute in the Philippine Islands. 'The inhabitants of the Philippines use a more complex attitude; they bend their body very low, place their hands on their cheeks, and raise at the same time one foot in the air with their knees bent.' I have done my best to imagine what a Filipino looks like when doing this, but I cannot. But I have no doubt the exercise makes for the development of the human calf.

We Europeans think we are being polite when we expose our heads, however bald, in all their nakedness in the presence of a lady. Other tribes, possibly as intelligent as ourselves, laugh at such capital nudity as ridiculous and even lacking in courtesy. Historians tell

us of the Great Shoe Question that agitated Burma in the last century when men were bitterly divided over the question whether foreigners should be compelled to take off, not their hats, but their shoes, when entering the royal presence. It all depends, indeed, on what part of the world you are in whether you are greeted with the imperative, 'Take off your hat,' or 'Take off your shoes.' It is more or less a geographical—or, perhaps, a theological—accident that at a Buckingham Palace garden party all the male guests do not take off their shoes instead of their hats when the king appears. I remember how more than forty years ago an Irish M.P. in Cork had his hat knocked off because he would not remove it while *God Save the Queen* was being played. This, it seems to me, is evidence of the superiority of the hat to the shoe for use on ceremonial occasions: it is more convenient for knocking-off purposes. If shoe-removing instead of hat-removing had been the local sign of politeness, it would have been necessary to knock the M.P. down and hold his legs in order to get his shoes off. As it was, this trivial incident excited an empire. Hundreds of pounds were spent in telegraphing an account of it to every far-flung newspaper

office in those parts of the map that are painted red. If somebody's shoes had been torn off for an act of disrespect in a Mohammedan country, we should have thought it rather funny. Knocking off a hat in a Christian country, however, was hailed as an act of justice and a triumph of civilization over barbarism. Our own particular salutes have something of the sacredness of taboos.

The head and the feet, however, are not the only parts of the body that are bared in the interests of politeness. The people of Arracan who will take off their sandals to you in the street, will also take off their stockings to you in the house. 'An Ethiopian takes the robe of another, and ties it about his waist, so that he leaves his friend half-naked. This custom of undressing on these occasions takes other forms: sometimes men place themselves naked before the person whom they salute; it is to show their humility, and that they are unworthy of appearing in his presence.' Again, we are told that 'Polynesian or African chiefs require more or less stripping, such as the uncovering to the waist which Captain Cook describes in Tahiti.' How fortunate that this practice does not prevail in London! It would be inconvenient if when going to dine with a publisher—the

English equivalent of a Polynesian or African chief—one had to remove, not only one's hat and overcoat, but one's dress coat, waistcoat, boiled shirt, and vest in the hall. In time,



GOING TO DINE WITH A PUBLISHER

however, we should no doubt get used to it, and even come to think that a man who appeared at a party in a coat with inhuman tails looked silly.

I myself, indeed, prefer several of the salutations common among the lesser breeds to those

that are usual in Europe. There is much, for example, to be said for the Negro custom of pulling the fingers till they crack. Unlike the Nazi salute, it makes for good nature. I have never been able to dislike anybody who could make his fingers crack, It is also a valuable osteopathic exercise. How pleasant a spectacle is conjured up in the sentence: 'When two Negro monarchs visit, they embrace in snapping three times the middle finger' ! This seems to me a much more endearing form of salutation than that prevalent among the Franks who tore hair from their heads and presented it to you. Well meant, I agree, but awkward for the receiver of the courtesy. Yet the custom may have had the same origin as the old-fashioned English custom of giving a lock of hair to the beloved. A Frank would probably have understood perfectly well the spirit of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's sonnet beginning:

**I never gave a lock of hair away
To a man, dearest, except this to thee.**

Possibly, some scholar will one day find among the remains of Frankish literature a piece of verse bearing some such title as: 'Sonnet on Receiving a Handful of Hair from a Beautiful Stranger.' But did the supply of hair never

give out in those days? Or was it because it did that men took to plucking each other's beards?

Rubbing noses and putting leaves on the head are to my mind more commendable forms of salutation. But the best of all salutes seems to me to be a matter not of gestures but of words. This is the salute of the Basutos who, when they meet their chiefs, cry: 'Tama sevata !' the English translation of which is : ' Greeting, wild beast!' If there is one salutation that more than another deserves to be imported from Africa into Europe, it is surely this. How excellently it fits the mood of the hour, when so large a part of the civilized world has found renovation in the politics of the jungle! Why not have cave-man salutations in a cave-man world? 'Greeting, wild beast!'—does it not stir the heart like a trumpet? How feeble in comparison seem those Argentinian arm-liftings! 'Greeting, wild beast!' It is a salutation for heroes.

VIII. THE RIGHT TO FEEL DISAPPOINTED

I HAVE had a vile holiday. I do not remember ever having had a viler. I got wet through. I got blown through. I was pursued by rain, thunder, hail, snow, and sleet—all in the course of a couple of hours. When in the house, I kept opening windows to let in fresh air and closing them again to keep out draughts. Till this Easter I had always longed to live in the country, but a week-end's experience of the country during one of Buchan's cold spells has converted me to a belief in the beauty of built-up areas.; I should not have minded if it had merely rained, not even if it had rained all the time, for one expects rain in the country, especially during a holiday, and a dripping, still, enervating spring day can be very peaceful and pleasant. **But** it is impossible to be comfortable in weather of the icy, blowing, nagging kind. There is no pleasure in walking, no pleasure in sitting down. One would far rather be spending the week-end at home in bed. In fact, there is nothing to do, unless you play

one of those escapist games, like golf. I sat in the house most of the time, and I hate sitting in the house.

Scarcely had I returned from my holiday, however, when I found a leader-writer sneering at people like me who are honest enough to confess that we did not enjoy our holiday. He quotes Confucius at us—Confucius whose philosophy was never put to the test by an April week-end in England—and tries to shame us with that arm-chair philosopher's aphorism: 'The higher type of man seeks all he wants in himself; the inferior man seeks all he wants from others.' And he adds: 'Those who spent a dull Easter because there was "nothing to do" in four days of leisure prove what Confucius said.' I have a strong suspicion that this cheerful leader-writer spent the Easter holiday at work in London. I have often sat in my office in London while other people were on holiday during periods of foul weather, and Confucius himself could not have borne the sufferings of the holiday-makers with greater equanimity than I. Rain by the bucketful, thunder on the left and right, gales at ninety miles an hour—I could see no reason why any of these things should affect the happiness of

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a man who was really wise and had, so to speak, plenty of internal resources. Holiday-makers, like the rest of us, I told myself, must be prepared to take the bad with the good, and I recalled the joy of getting soaked through at the age of eleven and the majesty of storm-swept seas flinging their foam high among the sea-gulls and salting the windows of farm-houses three miles inland. I ended, indeed, almost by envying people who were able to be out all day in such incredibly foul weather. The leader-writer from whom I have quoted is not the only (occasional) disciple of Confucius in the land.

When one is on a holiday, however, it is different. Here Confucius is no longer in an arm-chair, but in the back seat of a motor-car or in a cottage in the country or a hotel lounge from which he cannot escape owing to the east wind or the rain. After gazing through the window for a few moments at the abominable-looking landscape, he may say to himself, encouragingly: 'The higher type of man seeks all he wants in himself.' But, after he has gazed for half an hour and has noticed how the landscape has grown increasingly abominable-looking, he becomes more honest with himself and

asks himself: 'If the higher type of man seeks all he wants in himself, why the dickens did not I, who am the higher type of man, stay at home instead of imprisoning myself like this in the country?' And from this he advances to a consideration of the character of the higher type of man and of what, if we all belonged to the higher type of man, would happen to the modern world. In the first place, it is obvious, the higher type of man would never want to go out of town during holidays. He would say to himself: 'All I want is in myself. Brighton is not in myself. Hindhead is not in myself. Therefore I do not want Brighton or Hindhead. Why, then, not save money by staying at home?' And, indeed, half the philosophers have warned us against the folly of expecting too much from change of place or change of air. Change your character rather than your locality, they tell us; without change of character, change of locality is useless.

This is very true; but what would happen to the hotel industry if we all acted on this principle? Margate would be bankrupt within a twelvemonth; the whole south coast, where stockbrokers have for so long gloried and drunk

deep, would become a devastated area; and thousands of hotel-keepers and waiters would be applying for the dole. No one has yet, so far as I know, written a treatise on the economic consequences of philosophy. It is time someone did so, lest the leader-writer, with his talk about Confucius, should turn England at once into a land of philosophers and into a wilderness. Nor, if he has his way, will it be only the hotels that crumble into ruin. The railways also will be hard hit by the absence of millions of people who are seeking all they want in themselves. Motorists will be reduced in number by seventy-five per cent. In vain will restaurants try to corrupt the Confucian with exquisitely flavoured dishes; the philosopher, seeking all he wants (except vitamins) in himself, will order a large portion of bread and cheese and a glass of water. As for wine, whisky, and beer, they will become a memory of the past; and the tobacco - trade will be completely wiped out.

I do not say that even this alarming prospect should make us shrink from following Confucius or that the world would not ultimately be the better for our abstinence. At the same time, I hold that the higher type of man should

think of others as well as of himself and that, if he sees that seeking all he wants in himself is likely to land his neighbours in the bankruptcy court, he ought to become a practising philosopher as slowly and as cautiously as possible, lest his change of character should begin by doing more harm than good.

My own feeling is that the ordinary man cannot be expected to change his character all at once. Having been taught that the growth of civilization is to be measured by the increase of his wants, and having been trained by advertisers to seek what he wants from others, he cannot with an easy conscience turn apostate to the faith of his fathers and defy the loud evangel of the big advertisers by suddenly beginning to seek all he wants in himself. This being so, I should advise him, while changing his character to continue to change his locality also for a considerable time during holiday seasons. Let him seek what he wants, partly in himself and partly from others. Besides being philanthropic, this will enable him to enjoy the experience of being disappointed in two ways instead of only in one. I write in bitterness.

For myself, I began my holiday in a spirit of

perfect altruism. I never dreamed of seeking all I wanted in myself: I sought all I wanted from others. I was content—even insistently so—to be driven out of town by others. I looked forward to being cooked for by others and to having my glass filled by others in a number of country inns. And in none of these things did others fail me. But these were not the others who mattered most to me during the Easter holiday. I could rely on these as on the calendar. The real Other—the Other with a capital letter—from whom I was seeking what I wanted was Nature; and Nature, I told myself as I drove out past the suburbs into the chill sunshine, was going to give us all one of the most wonderful week-ends of our lives. It was cold at the moment, but the weather prophets told us that, if only we could be patient, as we shivered on Good Friday, warmth would follow and we should enjoy the Easter of our dreams. As the car hummed along, I could almost hear the willow-wrens that would be making the air sweet with their thousand-fold song in two days' time. I could see myself pausing at a bush to try to see the blackcap that was singing. In my mind's ear I could hear the iteration of the chiff-chaff. I could see

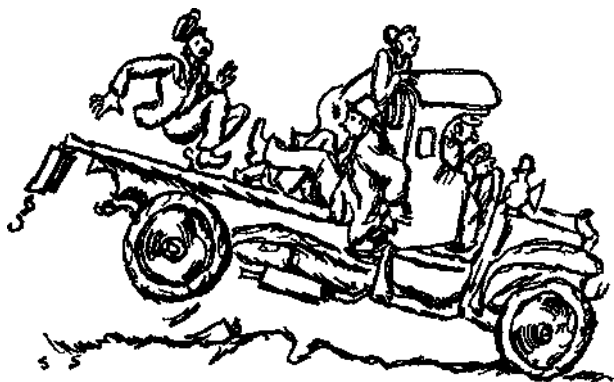
my first swallow, and my blood flowed in tune with his flight.

I confess I enjoyed the drive down: how lovely is Nature in anticipation! But my enjoyment of the drive down was as nothing in comparison with my enjoyment of the drive home. Oh, to be in London now that April 's there! It was my one thought as Nature grew grimmer and grimmer, and the air grew colder and colder, and I shut the windows and sat down beside the fire and re-read the stories of Mr Jacobs's night-watchman and tried to forget that I was in the country. I did walk to the top of a hill, but an icy wind was blowing and I came down again. I did see two swallows skimming along the surface of a pond, but they looked so miserable that I hurried back to the house for tea. I heard one willow-wren and thought I had never heard a willow-wren singing so wretchedly. I saw golfers putting in a hail-storm after a thunder-clap, and began to understand why some people regard golf as a form of lunacy. . . .

Nature never did betray the heart that loved her? This was not true last week-end. Confucius himself would have admitted my right to feel disappointed if he had been where I

66 RIGHT TO FEEL DISAPPOINTED

was. I think he would have approved of my hurrying home on Monday afternoon, swallowing a quick meal in a snack bar, and creeping into the beautiful, stifling air of a cinema to see Jack Hulbert—who never disappoints.



IX. RAILWAY STATIONS I HAVE LOVED

TURNING the knob of the wireless set, I paused at Athlone on hearing it announced that they were about to broadcast the arrival of the last mail-train at Broadstone Station, in Dublin, before the station was closed for ever.

I Had myself no sentimental recollections of Broadstone Station. I remembered it mainly as a station which the trains left at an unreasonably early hour in the morning. One left one's bedroom half-awake and one's hotel half-breakfasted and drove for what seemed miles through the chill morning air behind a horse that seemed even more anxious than one-self—unnervingly anxious, indeed — to reach the station in time for the train. At the station

itself I never cast a glance; there was no time for anything except to clamber into one's seat. The first time I did so I found myself in a compartment with a middle-aged woman who, as soon as the train moved, produced a spirit-stove, set it on the floor and lit it, and began to boil a kettle to make herself a cup of tea. She had little paper packages of all kinds, containing bread, butter, tea, sugar, and a medicine bottle filled with milk, and, as in her fussiness she kept constantly dropping paper within inches of the flame, I felt reasonably confident that she would end by setting the train on fire. As she picked the paper up, her skirt would catch the kettle and all but overturn both kettle and spirit-stove, and I began to feel more than reasonably confident that both she and I would in the not far distant future be reduced to ashes. The very motion of the train, which every now and then gave a vicious wobble that compelled her to keep the kettle and the stove steady by main force, increased my confidence. Never have I known a small kettle take so long to boil.) Never have I so longed to hear the first faint note of a kettle beginning to sing. If I could have sung myself I should have felt like joining in the singing. How good it was at last

to see the kettle boiling, the tea wet, and the woman enjoying a cup of it. She did not enjoy her cup of tea, however, half so much as I did.

The last time I travelled from Broadstone



CONFIDENT SHE WOULD SET THE TRAIN ON FIRE

Station the journey was even less serene. At Athenry a number of policemen with rifles boarded the train, and the engine-driver, as the custom was in those revolutionary days, refused to budge an inch farther unless the policemen got out. (The policemen lay back in their seats, laughing and smoking. Under

JO RAILWAY STATIONS I HAVE LOVED

the orders of the local Volunteers, the engine was then uncoupled from the rest of the train, and drove off by itself into the distance, hooting defiance. The police sat on; the rest of us got out, wondering what chance there was of ever reaching Galway. As the police remained perfectly, and not surprisingly, obstinate, the Volunteers then set about commandeering all the motor vehicles in the town, however ancient, and putting them at our service without payment. I myself was one of the last to leave, and had to be content with a place on what must have been a springless milk lorry put together by a mad amateur in the first days of motor-building. As I took my place in it, I almost envied the police, marooned in their comfortable seats in the engineless train. As the lorry bumped westward, making those who were standing perform a St Vitus's dance and those who were sitting feel that at any moment they might be shot skywards from their seats by the bucking motion of the lorry on the uneven road, most of us must have felt that the police had the laugh of us. I confess that in some ways I was enjoying myself because of the novelty of the thing, but there were moments—volcanic, bone-shaking moments—at which I

had no kindly thoughts of Broadstone Station for having set me forth on such a journey.

And yet how tenderly everybody spoke of it during the broadcast! How haunted with memories of happiness it seemed! Old servants of the railway company came into the signal-box from which the broadcast was given and spoke of the closing of the station as if for them it was the end of a world. Never again would the Galway mail arrive there in its midnight glory. Never again would a signalman give the signal that all was clear. A banquet-hall deserted—Broadstone Station would henceforth be only that to thousands for whom it had for long been associated with happiness—the happiness of the day's work, the happiness of companionship, the happiness of simply being alive on a fine day. There was a note of exile in the voices of the old railway servants who came to the microphone to say good-bye to the station. 'How do you feel about it?' an old ex-signalman of eighty was asked. 'Very sad,' he said, and he could say little more. They all felt very sad; a glory had departed from their earth. • Then came the great moment when for the last time on this side of paradise the Galway mail was signalled into Broadstone Station. A

hush fell. We heard the rumble of the approaching train. 'There she goes,' cried the announcer; and we could almost see the lights in the carriages as she passed. Then there were more valedictory speeches, concluding with one from an official who addressed the station in the noble apostrophe: 'Farewell, a long farewell, to all thy greatness.' At that moment it was difficult not to feel that one of the world's lights had gone out.

Moved by the occasion, I could not help wondering whether I myself could be stirred by sentiment so profound over the closing of any existing railway station. Euston has often been for me the scene of a jail-delivery into happiness—via Holyhead, via Liverpool, and via Fleetwood—but Euston itself by its very appearance seemed to be a part of the jail. A gloomy-fronted station with a particular fondness for making the holiday-maker set out from platform thirteen. And, if Euston cannot win the heart, what about King's Cross, what about Liverpool Street? Is it conceivable that, if one of these joyless stations were closed, any sane human being would give expression to a bleeding heart in the words: 'Farewell, a long farewell, to all thy greatness'? I doubt it. If

Charing Cross Station were moved south of the Thames, it would not cost me a pang. I should not care if Marylebone Station were turned into a cinema. I have no sentiment about any station in London, except Matthew Arnold's Fenchurch Street.

I fancy that the only stations I could ever really love were small stations—not these roofed-in affairs smelling of some strange and unpleasant drug, but little stations open to the sun and rain—wayside stations or termini that look like wayside stations. I certainly felt a twinge of sorrow when the old Portrush Station was destroyed to make room for a roofed building like any other important terminus. When I knew it first, it was bathed in sea air, with the sea excitingly visible from the platform. The engine and the engine-driver, as one walked down the platform, were a part of nature. Now everything is mechanical, hidden from the eye of day. Nor was Portrush Station in those days the only beautiful station on the line. Every station at which we stopped was beautiful. How enviable the people who got out at Cullybackey seemed! How enviable the country people on the platform! It is one of the curiosities of railways that if you are in the

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train, the people on the platform seem to be leading extraordinarily interesting lives, and, if you are on the platform, the people in the train seem to be leading extraordinarily interesting lives. It is much the same with harbours: if you are on the boat, the people remaining behind look enviable, and if you are on the quay, the people who are on the boat seem enviable. That is one reason why the young used to frequent railway stations and quays when everybody was admitted freely. They were suffering from — or enriched by — a Ulysses complex. They were enjoying travel by proxy—which is a much better way of enjoying travel than many pleasure cruisers realize till the pleasure cruise begins.

Ruskin would surely have been surprised if he had been told that a time would come when railway stations, like lakes and mountains, would become a part of the imaginative life of men, and when the sounding express engine no less than the sounding cataract would rouse in them a noble delight. He would have been still more surprised if he had been told that the closing of an old railway station would one day move men to sadness no less than the demolition of a Gothic church or the violation of a land-

scape. Yet how natural it is! Life is brief, and the removal of a long-tolerated equally with a long-loved landmark alters and injures the world in which we have been happier than we have deserved to be. There are, I am sure, cricket enthusiasts who would mourn over the disappearance of the eyesore gasometer overlooking Kennington Oval. They have got used to it, and under its shadow many a boundary has been scored by Abel and Hobbs. 'Farewell, a long farewell, to all thy greatness'—so they might well apostrophize its ruins. If you have tears to shed, then, spare a few of them for Broadstone Station. Without it—for better or for worse—Dublin will never be the same again.

X. FEAR OF HEIGHTS

' Do you like mountains ?' asked my friend when he heard that I was going for a holiday to the Rocky Mountains. 'No,' I replied. 'Neither do I , ' said he; 'but, much as I loathe all mountains, I don't think I have ever seen any quite so repulsive as the Rockies.' 'Good,' said I, for I like to hear discouraging reports of any new place that I am about to visit. This prevents disillusionment later on. Imagine that you are going to a paradise, and if the place does not come up to your expectations, you may be tempted to regard it as a purgatory. Imagine that you are going to a purgatory, on the other hand, and you will probably discover enough beauty in it to elate you into thinking of it as a demi-paradise.

My chief fear was, not that I should find the Rockies repulsively ugly, but that I should find them too high. I imagined that, as I passed through them by train, I should at many points be unable to look out of the window for fear of giddiness. I pictured the train as travelling

for mile after mile along a narrow ledge on the edge of a sheer precipice thousands of feet high. 'But the train 's not the worst,' said my friend; 'whatever you do, don't let them take you on a motor trip up the mountains. I went out one day in a motor coach, and the driver stopped to show the view at one place with one of the wheels over the edge of a precipice. I have never had such a terrifying experience in my life.' 'Help!' said I; 'but, at least, if any accident happens to you in such places, the great thing is that you would be killed outright and not merely mutilated.' 'There 's always that to be said for it,' said my friend.

After this conversation, it was with considerable apprehension that I looked forward to my holiday. As I lay in bed at night, I had visions of myself being whirled round precipices near the tops of mountains, and wondered whether I could survive it—I who feel uncomfortable even when walking across Waterloo Bridge. To these apprehensions my *alter ego* replied very gravely: 'What man has endured, man can endure.' 'That's the formula,' I said, much cheered; 'but, even so, nothing will persuade me to enter a motor coach in the Rocky Mountains.'

And so across the ocean and through a field of icebergs in a dense fog.

I wish I had stayed at home,' I said to myself, as the blast of the foghorn seemed to shake the ship at one-minute intervals, 'but what man has endured, man can endure.' And we continued to throw dice for pennies in the Knickerbocker Bar till bedtime. And so from Montreal, eating and sleeping in the train, day after day, night after night, speeding our way through the most anti-alcoholic country in the British Empire, till we reached Calgary. It was somewhere near Calgary in the early morning that we caught our first glimpse of the Rockies, eighty miles away. How charming they looked in the distance, a little low line of irregular hills, pearly and insubstantial in the morning light. No snow on their tops. In fact, nothing to worry about. 'These mountains,' I said to myself, 'are enchanting. They don't look much higher than the South Downs.'

We made our way gradually up to Banff without a precipitous prospect to trouble us. Mountains more majestic began to tower above us, but, though we were between 4,000 and 5,000 feet high, we seemed at the foot of them to be almost in the lowlands. How glorious

were their shapes as the landscape changed! Ranges of ash-grey peaks lit up by the sun, bare and barren rocks of a beauty that one had not dreamed of, alternated with spruce-covered heights, with rivers sometimes milky and sometimes pale green pouring through the valleys. Then came majestic mountains ten or eleven thousand feet high, looking like fortresses and castles that had been built by Titans on the roof of the world for security against gods more primeval than themselves. I asked someone on the train: 'What is that mountain that looks like an enormous cathedral?' 'It happens,' he said, 'to be called Cathedral Mountain.' The comparison must have been obvious to the first white man who saw it.

And so we sped on, a Yorkshireman gasping 'Incredible,' and a Somerset man murmuring 'Marvellous,' till a Welshman said 'Who 's got a bottle?' Whereupon we all remembered that Canada is a curiously dry country and, feeling even drier than Canada, made our way along the train to the sleeping-cabin that contained the frowned-on treasure. But we did not remain there long. The Rocky Mountains on a fine summer's day are more intoxicating even than mountain dew, and soon we were

out in the observation car again gazing at the perpetual novelty of snow-capped peaks, forest-clad slopes, gorges, rushing rivers, waterfalls pouring from the tops of the mountains under the wheels of the train—we were on a ledge by now, but a ledge seemed to be the perfect position from which to survey so beautiful a world—and following the course of the Kicking Horse River, which, while it flows one way, seems all the time to be fighting hard against itself and doing its utmost to turn in its tracks among the stones and flow the other. It seemed a sin that night should fall on such a world, but night fell and someone said: 'What about a drink?' and we made our way to the sleeping-cabin, murmuring 'Incredible,' 'Marvellous,' 'Indescribable,' and all the words that do not describe anything. And even then we were not satisfied, but returned to the blowing winds and cinders of the observation car and sat out under the moon and stars.

Later came the motoring trips. I had sworn to avoid them, but man does not choose his destiny. If he did, he would miss a great deal of enchantment. The fact is, that there was so much enchantment in the drive from Field to the Yoho Valley, to beautiful Emerald Lake

(which is really jade-coloured), and to Lake Louise (entrancing under the mountains), that I can remember as little of it in detail as of a perfect dream. It is true that we stopped on ledges to look at the view, but all four wheels were on the ledges at each stop. On Switch-back Hill—which is Boscastle multiplied by an astronomer—the Somerset man said: 'My hat, suppose the steering-gear went wrong' ; but the steering-gear did not go wrong. When we arrived at Lake Louise, 5,000 feet above sea-level, two of the party began to be height-conscious and withdrew to their rooms. But by the next morning they had grown accustomed to the mountain air, and were ready to take their seats in the motor-coach for Banff.

Since then I have driven a good deal through the Rockies and the most alarming moments I have been through were due, not to the occasional precipitous slopes above which the road winds, but to the driving of some of the visitors. The roads for the most part curve in and out, with only a log-rail a foot high as a protection on the edge of the declivity. And, as there is just room for two cars to pass, one is occasionally startled by meeting a car swinging round a blind corner on the wrong side of the road

without warning and pulling in to the right only just in time to avoid disaster. One motorist nearly crashed into us at a sharp bend above a precipice, and, to save himself, went into a skid on the oily surface of the road that might have taken him into eternity. No one seems to think of hooting. If everybody did, perhaps, the Rockies would resound with perpetual hooting, for you meet almost as many motor-cars on these mountain roads as you meet on a week-day in the country parts of Wiltshire. You scarcely ever see a pedestrian; you seldom see a house; and you may drive all day without seeing a town. But you are never long without meeting a motor-car.

To some people the multiplication of tourists, the provision of good roads, the building of hotels and bungalow camps may seem a detracting from the majesty of the Rockies. For myself, I like to find some of the amenities of civilization among the mountains. Wild nature is here on so vast a scale as to be beyond spoiling by the hand of man. Edward Whymper is quoted in the guide-books as having described the Canadian Rockies as fifty Switzerlands thrown into one; and man and his works must always be inconspicuous in so enormous and

towering a wilderness. Man cannot destroy the jagged spires of the tall mountains, with their crowning processions of spruce clearly outlined against the crystalline evening sky. These are mountains such as A. E. saw in visions. To sit beneath them and watch the nighthawks diving over a fast-flowing river, silver in the twilight, is to experience a rapture of contentment—to feel that nothing more beautiful was, ever created on this very beautiful earth.

Repulsive? Why, I saw an eagle yesterday from my bedroom window.

XL DIFFERENCES

IT is the differences that make all the difference to the pleasures of travel. (And by travel I mean not trudging through a jungle and being deserted by native guides when in a state of high fever, but visiting well-known resorts in other countries than one's own by means of luxurious boats, trains, and motor-cars.) What a pleasure it was, when one first visited France, to be precipitated at once into a world using a different speech and different coinage, different clothes and different forms of architecture! There are well-meaning people who would like to see the whole world speaking the same language. For many of us, however, this would greatly diminish the amenities of travel. My chief objection to visiting Switzerland is that it is an English-speaking country. When I address a hotel-porter in pidgin French, I do not like to be replied to in perfect English. One of the great charms of Spain, when not in a state of revolution, is that even in the big cities you may be unable to make a hotel-

porter or a shopkeeper understand you. I have seen four Londoners in a Madrid shop taking a quarter of an hour to convey to a chemist's assistant that one of them wanted a stick of shaving soap. In the end all four of them and the chemist's assistant were using sign-language like primitive men. That sort of thing makes one feel that one is really abroad.

Up to the present year, one of my many reasons for never having visited the United States or the British Dominions Beyond the Seas was that the inhabitants speak more or less the same language as myself. I should miss, on landing, I told myself, the rejuvenating music of strange and scarcely intelligible words ---words that fall all the more sweetly on the ear because they are less like customary speech than like bird-song. If I had remembered that Quebec, with its French-speaking inhabitants, is the eastern porch of Canada, I should have felt much less reluctant about crossing the Atlantic. But, having left school a long time ago, I did not quite know where Quebec was till I consulted a map on the eve of sailing. (Let no Canadian be offended by my ignorance. I have met people who did not know whether Belfast was in the north or the south of Ireland.)



A SENSE OF FOREIGN TRAVEL

Quebec has, fortunately, enough elements of strangeness to give the visitor a sense of foreign travel. The direction-posts speak two languages. There is a street near the waterside that might have been borrowed from a Rene Clair film, with washing hung above the wooden balconies and swarms of lively children climb-

ing into one's *calèche* and almost thrusting their tiny hands into one's pockets as they cry, 'Pennies! Pennies!' in French voices. ('Penny' means 'cent' here.) The very *calèche* in which one rides—high as a gig on its two wheels, with its glittering, white spokes and its orange-lined hood, is a pleasantly foreign-looking carriage. So is the four-wheeled buggy—both of them, no doubt, survivals preserved for the simple-minded traveller, and ill-adapted for toiling up streets as steep as the hill at Lyme Regis. The drivers, as they point out the sights—the wooden house where Montcalm lived, the Ladies' Protestant Home', etc.—speak the English of Frenchmen. If the French were not one of the most sensible peoples on earth, they would undoubtedly be running an irredentist movement for the recovery of Quebec.

Even apart from the French of Quebec, however, Canada is a sufficiently strange country to the visitor from England. Nowhere is it so like England as to make the visitor feel that he might as well have stayed at home. I have seen a quotation from an American who declared enthusiastically that the city of Victoria in Vancouver Island is 'as British as Basingstoke.' All I can say in regard to this is that

I have yet to discover a hotel at Basingstoke where the visitor can see a ruby-throated humming-bird among the delphiniums in the garden. Nor does one constantly meet bearded Sikhs walking along the Basingstoke pavements. Nor is Basingstoke set among the waters of the Pacific in view of the mountains. The very Japanese who carries your luggage to the bedroom reminds you in Victoria that you are not in Basingstoke. It is often said that British Columbia is the most English of all the provinces of Canada, but you do not find shops called 'meateterias' and 'grocceterias' in England. Nor is 'starter' a common substitute in England for hors-d'oeuvre. British Columbia, moreover, is a mountainous country almost to the water's edge with huge trees inhabited by birds that never sing in England.

For me it is the birds that chiefly differentiate Canada from England. One realizes the difference as soon as one catches sight of the Canadian robin. I first saw this thrush-sized bird—black-headed and red-breasted—when driving up to the Heights of Abraham in Quebec. I asked the driver what it was. 'We call it a googloo,' he said. I cannot help wondering whether he understood my question, for I have

met no one else who called the Canadian robin a googloo. The bird itself begins by being handsome, but, I confess, it ends by being irritating. How often have I crept up close to a bird on a bough, or excitedly watched a bird flying through a wood, hoping at last that I had discovered a grackle, a whisky-jack, or a bobolink, and with what exasperating consistency the bird turned out to be a Canadian robin! There never was a bird I hated so. It is as if in England you were looking for crossbills and Dartford warblers and always finding sparrows. Canada is fortunately rich in sparrows—not only the common sparrow of Europe, but sparrows of a dozen kinds—the grasshopper sparrow, the white-throated sparrow, the chipping sparrow, the song-sparrow that sings like a canary, and others. There is scarcely a bird that one sees or hears, indeed, that does not remind one that one is in a new hemisphere. The blue bird, the warbling vireo, the myrtle warbler, the green-backed swallow, the logger-head shrike, and the junco are all as un-English as 'meateteria.' I have not yet seen a cardinal or a scarlet tanager, but the knowledge that somewhere in Canada they are to be found lends the country something of the strangeness

of an earthly paradise. Even the Red Indians at Calgary in their beaded and feathered finery of white, and the cowboys in their ten-gallon hats, gave less of an impression of strangeness than the unseen cardinal and scarlet tanager.

Equally strange, though less romantically so, is the 'Gideons' Bible that one finds in every hotel bedroom. I suppose I had heard of the 'Gideons' Bible before; but it came as a charming surprise to open the book and study the preliminary instructions to the reader:

1. If you are in trouble, read Psalm 34.
2. If trade is poor, read Psalm 37.
3. If very prosperous, read I Corinthians 10, verse 12.
4. If overcome with backsliding, read James I ; Hosea 14, 4-9.
5. If tired of sin, read Psalm 51 ; Luke 18, 9-14.

And so on. I looked up the psalm which one is advised to read when trade is poor, and discovered that it contains the consoling prophecy that 'the meek shall inherit the earth.' It might also, I imagine, suggest encouragingly to a man in financial difficulties that those who are more prosperous than himself are for the most part 'evil-doers,' who shall be cut off and perish and be as the fat of lambs: 'they shall

consume; into smoke shall they consume away.' I am afraid that if I were down on my luck these pious reflections would afford me but cold comfort.

It is strange that, in spite of the multiplicity of 'Gideons' Bibles, headlines in the press should announce that Canada is steadily deteriorating in morals. At least, a paragraph in one paper is headed:

SIN INCREASING, PRINCE EDWARD ISLANDERS HEAR.
INSTITUTE QUESTIONNAIRES FIND CANADA
BECOMING MORE WICKED.

This can hardly be true of the province of Alberta, which chose as its Prime Minister Mr William Aberhart, who preaches the gospel of Social Credit from the pulpit of the Prophetic Bible—or Bible Prophecy—Church. Churches of all kinds seem to flourish in Alberta; they have not only the Anglican, Presbyterian and United Church of Canada, but the British-Israel World Federation, the Church of the Nazarene, the Rosicrucian Fellowship Centre, the Pentecostal Tabernacle, The Foursquare Gospel Church, the Christian Scientists, and the National Spiritualists. At the Calgary Stampede many of the refreshment-tents advertise the fact that they are organized by such-and-such a church.

Apart from this, who could impute increasing sinfulness to a part of the world in which it is impossible to get a glass of beer on Sunday, even in the hotel at which one is staying?

That, I may say, is one of the differences between Canada and England that I do not altogether appreciate. Still, it is better than no difference at all. It makes one realize that one is in a foreign country, and that is the first pleasure of travel.



XII. MEAT

'I THINK,' a man said to me the other day, 'I would rather be dead than give up wine. I would certainly rather be dead than give up meat.' That is a point of view that I have never been able to understand—or, at least, to share. In practice, I seldom give things up; but I often look forward to giving things up and find the prospect rather agreeable. I am convinced that I could live a perfectly happy life without this, that, or the other thing. There are men who say that they would rather die

than give up tobacco—an absurd choice, it seems to me, since it all but implies that before the discovery of tobacco life was not worth living. I do not wish to disparage tobacco, but I wonder whether the human race would have been much less happy to-day if the virtues of the tobacco-plant had never become known.

And, if life without tobacco is worth living, it seems to me that life without meat is even more so, since it is easier to find a substitute for meat than for tobacco. Apart from this, how many people are there who owe very much of their happiness to meat? Do memories of meat throng our minds when we contemplate the past? The gourmet, it may be, milestones his life with great dishes eaten in great restaurants or in the houses of his fellow-gourmets; but the gourmet is as unnatural and as rare as the ballet-dancer. He possesses the genius of eating, but he does so at the cost of no longer being a normal human being. The normal human being—perhaps it would be better to say 'the normal Englishman'—is a utilitarian at his food. He eats his meals as a necessary part of the day's routine, neither looking forward to them with anticipatory rapture nor looking back on them through a haze of emo-

tion. He enjoys eating, but that is mainly because a craving is thereby satisfied. If, however, he had not a superstitious belief that meat is more strengthening than vegetables, he would be perfectly happy on a diet of beans and cauliflower.

We have various reasons for suspecting that the pleasures of meat-eating have been exaggerated. One is that no great poet has ever addressed to meat lines as ecstatic as have been addressed even to the humbler flowers of the field. Wordsworth was obviously more profoundly moved by the sight of a lesser celandine than by the sight of a saddle of mutton. Shakespeare never put into the mouth of a heroine a catalogue of meat dishes to rival Perdita's catalogue of flowers. The birds of which the poet sings are not birds on the table, but birds in the freedom of the air. Keats was a poet with appetites, yet he never hymned roast pheasant as he hymned the Hampstead nightingale. When Browning's thoughts turned home to England in April, he longed to be in England, not in order to be in time to eat the last pork of the season, but in order to hear the thrush and the whitethroat. Go through the great poets, and you will find that in their attitude

to meat there is not a tittle of evidence of romantic love, of that spirit of adoration without which, it seems to me, life is not worth living. Homer's characters are least interesting when they are eating. Meat-eating has been celebrated comically by Ben Jonson and others, but the great lyric in praise of meat has yet to be written. The very word 'meat' is slightly disgusting. 'Mutton' is not disgusting but ugly. The language of the butcher's shop contains scarcely a word that a poet could use. 'Rump steak,' 'chump chop,' 'kidney,' 'calves' liver,' 'tripe,' 'pig's cheek,' 'trotters,' 'sausages'—what a list of barbarities of speech! During the War, we were made to realize how revolting is the butcher's vocabulary when a number of the meats I have mentioned were officially classified as 'offals.' Can it really be said that our happiness depends on our consumption of things so basely named? I doubt it. If meat had been intended to inspire us to divine enthusiasm, Nature would have provided us with a vocabulary adequate to our raptures. Think of the brutally prosaic quality of the word 'joint.' I can recall at the moment only two really beautiful words relating to meat—'sirloin' and 'saddle.' For the rest, I do not

wonder that the English restaurants conceal the hideous names of their meat dishes by translating them into a foreign tongue.

Even birds acquire ugly, or at least commonplace, names when they become edible. Compare, for example, 'hen' with 'willow-wren,' 'duck' with 'goldfinch,' 'goose' with 'fire-crest.' Some of the game birds, I grant you, are happier in their names, but, even so, the plover on a dish has never stirred emotions as deep as the plover crying among the martyrs' graves.

Now I am one of those who are convinced that the [things that make life most worth living are the things about which men write poetry. I conclude, therefore, that, as no great poetry has been written about meat, meat-eating cannot be one of the things that make life most worth living. It is no more than one of the minor pleasures of life, and I doubt whether it is even one of the chief of the minor pleasures. If it gave us as much pleasure as, say, reading or looking at birds, some of us would enjoy—enthusiastically enjoy—eating alone. Yet who, except an extreme gourmet, could enjoy spending his evenings dining alone in one great restaurant after another on the choicest dishes?

If meat-eating were one of the things that make life worth living, thousands of us would be doing this (if we had the means). We should even, I think, resent the presence of company at the table that would interrupt the flow of our sensations as with teeth and tongue we prepared the flavours of exquisite foods for their journey through our beings. Yet, so far as my experience goes, the men who talk most about food cannot bear to be left alone with food. They cannot enjoy the meat they praise except in company. You see them in restaurants surrounded by their guests, chattering away—probably about Communism. I am firmly persuaded that no man, when among the things he really loves, has any thoughts to spare for Communism or for anything else except the things beloved. The bird-lover, catching sight of the first swallow, is rapt into a world above politics. See a salmon leaping up the swirling falls of a mountain river, and the news in the day's paper fades from your mind. At sight of a close finish for the Gold Cup, how you would hate a neighbour who tried to engage you in irrelevant conversation! Yet the meat-eater actually likes to have his alleged ecstasies broken in upon. He will talk about *Mutiny on the Bounty* while

eating the most exquisite dishes, and will discuss the Japanese War when all his thoughts should be of chicken. I have, I admit, met one or two men who turned a meal into a long series of exclamations of delight. They shouted with joy through the duck course, like spectators at a football match. I was almost persuaded at the time that such raptures as theirs should be set to Mozartian music. The common gourmet, however, takes part in no such chorus. He is a conversationalist first and a gourmet afterwards. He would, I am convinced, prefer a second-best meal in company to the best meal without it. For myself, I confess, my notion of purgatory would be to be doomed to sit alone, day after day, eating a perfect lunch and a perfect dinner in a perfect restaurant. I could give up meat more easily than I could give up company, and, without company, meat is merely a comparatively pleasant means of ending my hunger.

If good vegetarian cooks were easy to find, indeed, I should feel it no great hardship to be forbidden ever to eat meat again. I owe much of my sustenance, but little of my positive happiness, to meat-eating, and I have obtained from meat-eating none of those exhilarations—

exhilarations lasting in the memory—that I have obtained from smoking and drinking. And even as regards smoking and drinking I cannot believe that either of them is necessary to a happy life. I might find some difficulty in giving them up to-day, but I have no objection to the idea of giving them up to-morrow. On the whole, I envy the non-smoker and teetotaller provided he is not a non-smoker or teetotaller on principle. He has achieved a freedom not yet mine; and, as Herr Hitler has told us, without freedom life is not worth living.

A little private means, a little house in the country, a few books, a pair of field-glasses, a wireless set, a gramophone, and a little faith in the future—with these I can imagine myself living a perfectly happy life, even though I were never to taste meat, wine, or tobacco again. It is the townsman, not the man, in me that craves for these. The man in me is an abstainer in embryo, and abstains from abstaining only because he lacks those private means,

XIII. FIRE!

ALL London hurried out to see the Crystal Palace burning. The more civilized human beings become, the more irresistible apparently is their instinct to hasten to a conflagration. I do not know whether primitive man had the same instinct. His attitude to fire, I imagine, was more utilitarian and less aesthetic than that of a modern Londoner. He may have delighted in the spectacle of flames devouring an enemy's village, but it is unlikely that he took an aesthetic pleasure in seeing a house on fire in his own village. Even in the civilized world to-day as a rule it is only the townsman who can look on at a great fire as at a spectacle in the theatre. The Canadian countryman finds no enjoyment in looking on at a forest fire: the Australian countryman finds no enjoyment in looking on at a bush fire. The ravages of fire are to them a thing to be as much dreaded as the ravages of disease.

It is true that the townsman's emotions as he looks on at a fire are mixed. His is not the

simple happiness of a child watching a firework display. He still feels the primitive awe of fire, and his pleasure is not merely a pleasure in the splendour of leaping flames, but the pleasure of curiosity sharpened and satisfied. He may even suffer agonies if he knows that lives are in peril in the burning building, but he cannot stay away from the scene. Disaster has its fascinations no less than scenes of rejoicing. In the course of time, I fancy, most men who have been witnesses of a great disaster that did not affect them personally come secretly to congratulate themselves on their good luck—good luck, not in having escaped the disaster, but in having seen it. There were probably old men after Nero's day who used to tell their grandchildren rather boastfully of the night on which they saw Rome burning. They may not have felt it at the time, but their awe was not unmixed with enjoyment. A man feels a little the greater for being associated in a little way with a great horror.

It is an odd thing that in spite of all the devastations it has wrought among mankind, fire has so seldom been denounced as an evil by the wise and good. Why, I wonder, should it in this respect have escaped the fate of gold,

love, wine, liberty, religion, and nearly everything else that has brought bane and blessing to the human race? Gold brought greed, or at least an increase of greed, into the world; and, as a result, the ancient poets and philosophers cursed the day on which it was first torn from its hiding in the earth. Love brought disaster to its thousands and tens of thousands, and was damned by many good men therefor as a sin. Wine—well, in one aspect it is certainly a destroyer, and good men and better women have rushed to the conclusion that, if wine could be banished, this would be a world fit for Pippa to live in. As for liberty, see what a peril it seems to many modern Europeans, or (to be more exact) to the few modern Europeans who dictate to many modern Europeans. For religion, *vide* Lucretius, *vide* Lenin. Such things are dangerous, as everything in this dangerous world is dangerous, and should therefore be abolished or suppressed. Fire, water, and air—three exceedingly dangerous elements—seem alone to have escaped condemnation. I wonder why?

There may have been some famous pyrophobes in the long procession of well-meaning nonsense which is so important a part of the

history of mankind; but, as a rule, it must be admitted, Prometheus with his gift of fire has been regarded as a benefactor of the human race. If I had not casually dipped into Shelley's notes on *Queen Mab* the other day, I should have thought that this view of Prometheus was universal. To my surprise, however—surprise impossible to a man with more learning or a better memory—I discovered in Shelley that a case could be, and had been, made out even against Prometheus, and that it had been argued by a poet of some standing that the world was a better place before fire was invented. 'Hesiod says,' writes Shelley—and I do not doubt him—'that, before the time of Prometheus, mankind were exempt from suffering; that they enjoyed a vigorous youth and that death, when at length it came, approached like sleep, and gently closed their eyes.' Even Horace, I learned—and I should have remembered this from my schooldays—suggested that Prometheus's gift of fire brought plague and fevers in its train.

To us who live farther north than Hesiod and Horace this view of Prometheus seems to savour of ingratitude. How numb one's fingers would be as one writes an article on a December

afternoon if one were not a receiver of Prometheus's stolen goods, now flamboyantly exhibited in the fireplace! Fireplace—has the word a single evil connotation for us? Fireside—a happy fireside clime for weans and wife—why, it is the dream of all the best men and of all the worst men in their best moods. I once belonged to a club called the Fireside Club—a little paradoxically named, perhaps, because it met round the fireside not of a home, but of a public-house parlour, and weans and wives were not admitted—and the very name of the club made one feel a better man at the end of the evening's meeting. How, then, could Shelley, supporting himself by the example of Hesiod and Horace, bring himself to malign the innocent gift of Prometheus? You probably know the answer. In case you do not, I will tell it to you. Shelley was a vegetarian and—at that time of his life—regarded Prometheus as a scoundrel who had seduced mankind into eating roast beef, pork chops, and sausages.

After quoting Hesiod and Horace, he continues: 'How plain a language is spoken by all this, that Prometheus (who represents the human race) effected some great change in the

condition of his nature, and applied fire to culinary purposes ; thus inventing an expedient for screening from his disgust the horrors of the shambles! From this moment his vitals were devoured by the vulture of disease. It consumed his being in every shape of its loathsome and infinite variety, inducing the soul-quelling symptoms of premature and violent death. All vice rose from the ruin of healthful innocence. Tyranny, superstition, commerce, and inequality were then first known when reason vainly attempted to guide the wanderings of exacerbated passion.'

And, in his anti-Promethean fervour, Shelley goes on to quote a passage from Mr Newton's *Defence of Vegetable Regimen*: 'Prometheus first taught the use of animal food (*primus bovem occidit Prometheus*) and of fire, with which to render it more digestible and pleasing to the taste. Jupiter, and the rest of the gods, foreseeing the consequences of these inventions, were amused or irritated at the short-sighted devices of the newly formed creature, and left him to experience the sad effects of them. Thirst, the necessary concomitant of a flesh diet (perhaps of all diet vitiated by culinary preparation) ensued; water was resorted to,

and man forfeited the inestimable gift of health which he had received from Heaven ; he became diseased* the partaker of a precarious existence, and no longer descended slowly to his grave.'

From all this you may conclude one of two things—either that as good a case can be made out for detesting and denouncing fire as for detesting and denouncing gold, love, wine, liberty, and religion, or that when men become doctrinaires they talk the most inhuman nonsense. Of the two possible conclusions I prefer the second.

The fact is, there are few things that are absolutely good or evil in themselves. Even truthfulness, as Ibsen pointed out in the interests of truth, may become a vice. Mercy itself may become merciless if it lets loose on the world a homicidal maniac in response to a plea from a broken-hearted woman; and justice untempered by mercy turns hateful. Liberty that men die for, worshipping her as a goddess, may easily change shape into a painted hag; and religion throughout the ages has had aspects that were devilish as well as aspects that were divine.

Let us, then, not be too ready to accept the early Shelley's indictment of Prometheus. Prometheus may be responsible both for the Crystal

Palace fire and for a certain gnawing at the liver from which I am at the present moment suffering. But, despite this, how enormous are his benefactions! The disappearance of the Crystal Palace does not affect me as closely as would the disappearance of the Gas Light and Coke Company. If Rome once burned to the accompaniment of Nero's fiddling, my own drawing-room fire burns innocently to the accompaniment of wireless music from Germany after midnight.) My very cigarette is lit by Prometheus. Without his aid the taxi that brings me home/would be as helpless as a dead donkey. Without Prometheus there would be no coffee, no tea, no cakes, no ale, no homes, no theatres, no street lamps, no anything except raw fruits and vegetables.

However much you may regret the fire at the Crystal Palace, you must admit that Shelley, in his denigration of Prometheus, wrote like an inexperienced boy.

XIV. IN PRAISE OF ESCAPE

ANY one who reads contemporary criticism must have noticed an increasing tendency among critics to accuse certain authors of 'escape tendency.' These critics do not always tell us exactly what the authors tend to escape from, but they leave us with the impression that to escape is a very bad, sometimes even an ignoble, thing. This, I think, is a peculiarly modern view. Before the invention of gas, the word 'escape' was in most cases used in a good sense. The *Odyssey*, which was written in the dawn of European literature, is one long glorification of escape ; and no one has ever thought any the worse of Ulysses for escaping from the cave of Polyphemus. In English literature, *The Pilgrim's Progress* is from beginning to end a celebration of escape; and, though Christian has been censured for leaving his wife and children behind him when he first set out, no one has suggested that a wiser and better man would have stayed in the City of Destruction with his neighbours instead of escaping while there was

we blame Jim Hawkins for his many escapes as we read *Treasure Island*. On the contrary, we tell ourselves that such escapes as his were made possible only by his exceptionally fine and fearless character. And if we turn from literature to life, we shall find that we are equally on the side of the escapers, from David the son of Jesse down to Mr Winston Churchill. Great are the virtues of escape. Both history and literature would be considerably the poorer without it.

Those who use the word 'escape' in a derogatory sense, however, will no doubt regard all this as irrelevant. They will point out that their meaning is obvious—that they object to escape only when it is an escape from reality, from life, its facts and its problems. I see that in an American Dictionary of Psychology, 'escape tendency' is defined as 'an attitude looking towards flight or avoidance, which an individual may assume with respect to certain situations.' That, it seems to me, does not carry us very far. Most of us, for example, will agree that with respect to certain situations, an attitude looking towards flight or avoidance is highly desirable. The wise pedestrian is acutely conscious of an escape tendency in

himself as he crosses an arterial road with a procession of fast motor-cars bearing down on him, and it is to our escape tendency that the doctors appeal when they urge us to allow ourselves to be vaccinated against smallpox. Many things—perhaps most things—were meant to be escaped from. Mr Wells tries to persuade us to escape from Nationalism, the muddle of modern civilization, and a great number of other things. Freud tries to persuade us to escape from our repressions; Lady Astor tries to persuade us to escape from beer. There is scarcely a reform, right-headed or wrong-headed, that does not appeal to 'an attitude looking towards flight or avoidance.' We have recently seen the flight from gold, and at the present moment every rational man and woman is praying—or, at least, hoping—that Europe will aim at the avoidance of war.

Why, then, should writers be denied the right to escape, or to desire to escape, which is so lavishly permitted to the rest of the community? I have heard Keats criticized as an escapist poet, but it seems to me that Keats's escape into a world of transcendent beauty was one of the luckiest escapes that have happened in the history of English literature. It was an escape

from ordinary life into the realms of genius, and the results of it still enrich the imaginations of his fellow-men. To call a poem of Keats 'escapist' seems to me as fundamentally meaningless as to call a beautiful sunset escapist. The imaginations of a poet are no less a part of the realities of life than the demands of the income-tax collector, and, though it may be immoral to try to escape from the second, it is to the first that we turn in search of a more profound as well as of a more pleasant experience. Even the dreamiest poet who enables us to escape from the real world enables us also to escape into a finer world which is equally real and sometimes more so. There is no such thing as an unreal world if it is written about in great verse or prose.

Charles Lamb again has been censured as an 'escapist.' His sentiment and humour seem to some of his critics to spring from an avoidance of seeing life steadily and seeing it whole. He is regarded by them as a man who in his writings deliberately substituted flattering unctions for the blistering mustard-plaster of Truth—whatever Truth may be. Well, Charles Lamb was a man who suffered much and who did not parade his sufferings in print. He escaped from

the burden of his miseries into laughter and sentimental memory, and in his essays he has provided thousands of others with a way of escape in miserable hours. I can see no betrayal of integrity in this. To write as Charles Lamb wrote seems to me to be an act of friendship to mankind.

One of the odd things about the critics of 'escape' is that almost the only writers they accuse of 'escapism' are beautiful or sentimental or cheerful writers—writers of day-dreams and fairy-tales in various forms. I have often wondered why this should be so, for it seems to me that many ugly, hard, and cheerless writers are equally inspired by the longing for escape. There is such a thing as *nostalgie de la boue*, and many people who are not in the *boue* long to escape back into it. The realistic method of writing, no less than the dreamily fantastic and the sentimental, is the result of 'an attitude looking towards flight or avoidance . . . with respect to certain situations.' Zola avoided some of the facts of life as assiduously as Dickens avoided others. And, if the writers of realistic books are 'escapists,' I am convinced that their readers are equally so. Tales of miserable childhood, miserable marriages, and miserable

circumstances piled one above the other mountain high, provide a way of escape from ourselves and our circumstances as effectively as any sentimental story with a happy ending. Mr Desmond MacCarthy hints at this in a note on 'the pleasure of disgust' in his book *Experience*. He declares that, if you have been irritated and disgusted by the common miseries of life and read Huysmans, 'you will find that whatever has disgusted you . . . is described with an atrabilious vehemence, an extravagance of acrimonious precision, at once exaggerated and acute, which will bring you a little temporary relief.' 'To the shivering fastidious,' he says later in the paragraph, 'it is a keen pleasure to find their complaints stated by one more shivering and more fastidious than themselves—and with such a fury of contempt. I find it myself a refreshing change from the cheery pooh-pooh attitude. The fun of reading Huysmans is the fun of seeing the ugly, dank, flaccid thing, presented not as it is, but as even uglier, greasier, meaner.' In other words, one who is tired of pretty falsities can still get 'a little temporary relief (or escape) through ugly falsities.

So that we all seem to be escapists. Some

ways of escape are no doubt better than others, but whatever way we choose—music or mathematics, poetry or table-tennis, politics or the cinema—we are all trying to escape, many of us without even knowing what from or what to. It seems to me to be the function of the critic, as of the moralist, not to belittle 'escape' as a bad thing in itself, but to discriminate between the finer and the baser forms of it.) But, even when this had been done, I should still maintain that not only the finest, but the half-fine and even quarter-fine, ways of escape enrich the life of the ordinary human being. The enjoyment of games, for example, may not be as noble as the enjoyment of Greek tragedy, but it makes more people happy. And there is always a *prima-facie* case to be made out for anything that makes people happy without doing other people any harm.



XV. THOUGHTS ON UMBRELLAS

WHEN I saw the heading, ' Thoughts on Umbrellas,' over a letter in *The Times*, it struck me that during a longish life I had devoted extraordinarily little thought to umbrellas. I am not sure whether I have ever even possessed an umbrella. If I have, it must have been given to me, for I certainly never bought one. I do not know whether I possess an umbrella at the present moment. If I do, it must be hidden away in some dark corner. I have been trying to remember whether, on the one or two occasions when I have worn a top-hat, I also carried an umbrella. The umbrella seems the complement of the top-hat ; yet I fancy I went no further than the top-hat towards perfection

of attire. It is not that I was always hostile to umbrellas. (As a child I liked to stand under an umbrella on a wet day and listen to the patter of the rain on it. I regarded the umbrella, however, not as a protection against the rain—for I did not mind getting wet—but as a musical instrument. Those musical overhead sounds delight us in childhood. What a pleasure it was to stand in a barn in so-called foul weather and to hear the rain beating monotonously on the roof! It was a pleasure almost as keen as standing under a railway-bridge and listening to a passing train thundering overhead. Our enjoyment of such things is probably akin to our enjoyment of the drilling of the woodpecker and the music of the drum.

The umbrella, however, though it afforded me aesthetic pleasure, appealed to me less and less as I grew up and saw that it was generally looked on as a utility or, worse still, an emblem of respectability. I was not a bigot, and could see well enough that men wearing top-hats in our variable climate had to carry umbrellas in self-defence. But I disliked the habit of carrying umbrellas as ornaments—a sort of silk-trouseried walking-stick—and I disliked it especially in the young. The Greeks and the Romans,

it is said, regarded the carrying of umbrellas by persons of the male sex as a mark of effeminacy, and I, though I did not know it at the time—and, indeed, did not know it till the present moment, when I looked up 'umbrella' in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*—was with the Greeks and the Romans in this matter. It may be that the Greeks and the Romans were not confronted by the same problems as the Ulidians, since it was from the sun rather than the rain that they needed protection. Even so, I could not see why any man worthy of the name and not wearing a top-hat should object to getting wet. It seemed as unnatural as the objection of some women to getting sunburnt. When I saw a young man in a bowler-hat carrying an umbrella in those days, I used to think to myself: 'That is the sort of finicking young fellow who on a wet day would tiptoe his way across a street for fear of getting his boots muddy.' Excessive care of boots and shoes always struck me as being a vice, and I put the carrying of umbrellas by the young in the same category.

Yet one of the dearest of my friends constantly carried an umbrella. I will say this for him, however: he never wore an overcoat; and even his umbrella, instead of being an expression of

respectability, was the disguise of a fundamentally Bohemian temperament. I never met a man who was so Bohemian in character and who at the same time hated all the outward signs of Bohemianism as impatiently as if he had been a churchwarden. He shaved every morning; he brushed his clothes carefully before going out; he kept his hair cut to a proper shortness; he dressed as neatly as a clubman—I am speaking of the clubman of another century—in short, he did everything in public to entitle him to be called respectable except go to church or refrain from going into public-houses. Nor was this respectability of his a form of hypocrisy. It was the result partly of fastidiousness and partly of modesty. He disliked making himself a showpiece in the streets, and preferred to go about as inconspicuously as if he were the most respectable man alive. Hence he observed all the conventions that make for inconspicuousness. His very umbrella served him much as the cloak of invisibility served the man in the fairy-tale.

Despite this single instance, however, the umbrella throughout the ages has usually been an instrument of boastfulness. 'In Eastern countries,' according to the *Encyclopaedia*, 'from

the earliest times the umbrella was one of the insignia of royalty and power.' In India the Mahratta princes used as one of their titles 'Lord of the Umbrella.' In 1855—I am quoting authorities who know more about these matters than I do—the King of Burma, in an address to the Governor-General of India, spoke of himself as 'the monarch who reigns over the great umbrella-wearing chiefs of the Eastern country.' It is clear that the umbrella, which began its conquest of England towards the end of the eighteenth century, had its origin in what is called 'swank.' England was apparently not entirely destitute of umbrellas before that time, but tradition—and tradition is as good a historian as any other—says that Jonas Hanway, the eighteenth-century traveller, was the first Englishman who regularly carried an umbrella. That, as every one knows, was the prelude to the imperial boastfulness of the nineteenth century. Not all at once, however, was the umbrella to triumph. Unless my very fallible memory for historical facts is mistaken, King Louis Philippe was much derided in England and elsewhere at the time of his downfall as a king who had carried an umbrella. After that, however, the umbrella reigned supreme. Kings

and commoners alike hastened to provide themselves with umbrellas, and an age was ushered in in which the umbrellaless Chaucer and the umbrellaless Shakespeare would have found it difficult to breathe. So common a possession has the umbrella become nowadays that, if you go to see the Derby on a wet day, Epsom Downs has the appearance of an enormous field thick with enormous mushrooms. But is any one writing poetry as good as Shakespeare's to-day? No, but every one—except me—has an umbrella.

Apart from imperialism, one of the worst results of the popularization of the umbrella was the general decline of honesty. Nothing—not even books—has been stolen during the last hundred years on the same lavish scale as umbrellas. People have become so inured to this kind of theft that even judges will laugh at a story about a stolen umbrella. Very few of your friends would think of stealing the clock from your mantelpiece, or making off with your silver candlesticks, yet there is scarcely one of them who would not take your umbrella with a light heart. So common has the theft of umbrellas become that an eminent clergyman, still living, had a silver plate made for the

handle of his umbrella, bearing the inscription: 'This umbrella was stolen from the Rev.-----'.

He thought that in this way he would shame the thieves into returning the umbrella on the pretence that it had been taken by mistake. Israel Zangwill told me that on one occasion he dined at a house at which this clergyman was the other guest. The clergyman left first, and Zangwill, when leaving, could not find his own umbrella. The only umbrella to be found in the hall was one bearing the inscription: 'This umbrella was stolen from the Rev. -----'.

As it was pouring with rain, Zangwill took it home and, on the following morning, wrote to the clergyman asking him whether he had carried off his umbrella by mistake. The clergyman replied with specious excuses, and an exchange of umbrellas took place. Zangwill said that, after recovering his umbrella, he wrote thanking the clergyman and informing him that he was having an inscription engraved on the handle: 'This umbrella was stolen by the Rev.-----'.

When once the rot had set in, indeed, even the most eminent churchman could not be trusted. I would trust any bishop in England with my watch, but I doubt whether there is a single

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bishop I could trust with my umbrella, if I possessed one.

Yet there are occasions on which an umbrella is more indispensable than a watch. I was once told that many of the Chinese dislike going into battle without umbrellas, whereas they do not mind going into battle without watches. Is this for protection, I wonder? During the War, I heard of a London lady who always put up her umbrella if she happened to be out walking when an air-raid took place. An umbrella may not be bomb-proof, but it promotes confidence. Umbrellas are also useful as weapons of offence. 'I 've got the sword,' said Tweedledum in *Alice*, 'but you can have the umbrella—it's just as sharp.' I have seen a man in a sporting crowd making a very good attempt to strike a mobbed referee over the head with an umbrella. As a rule, however, the umbrella is the symbol of peace. You cannot imagine, for instance, Fascists and Communists fighting each other with umbrellas. Besides, umbrellas suggest rain, and nobody likes fightings-----least of all, street-fighting—in the rain. 'Rain as a rule can disperse a mob much more effectively than the police. I have been told by a friend, however, that this is not

so in Paris, and that, when it began to rain during a riot in Paris some time ago, the Parisians simply put up their umbrellas and went on rioting. That is merely one more proof that the French are the most martial nation on earth.

It also suggests that there is little to be said for the umbrella, except that it may occasionally keep one dry. (And even then it does not protect the bottoms of one's trousers. The only umbrella that I should care to carry would be one that I could wear round my knees.



XVI. FIRST TIME ACROSS

I SHARE few of the passions of the Pilgrim Fathers ; and of these few the passion for crossing the Atlantic has never been one.

Having now crossed it for the first time, I can understand what Oscar Wilde meant when he said that he was disappointed in the Atlantic Ocean. It seemed to me a curate's egg of an ocean. Seen on a day of wind and flying rain, it had the same depressing effect as the sea on a wet Sunday at Brighton.

Scarcely seen at all through the thick fog that settled down among the icebergs it was no more agreeable than the all but incessant moan of the foghorn that went on from the end of dinner till dawn.

Even so, I should not myself say that I was disappointed in the Atlantic Ocean. I was disappointed only in about two-fifths of it. Three-fifths of it was as entrancing as a lagoon in a South Sea Island film.

Speaking of the sea, a friend said to me before I left: 'On these big ships you need never even see the beastly thing.'

I have not my friend's philosophic temperament, however. If the sea is anywhere about, I cannot help looking at it, and I like to look at it from the top deck.

To go two days out from land and, hiding oneself from the wind behind a wall of canvas, to throw rings of rope on to numbered squares, and to spend one's time on similar games seems to me to be a waste both of the ocean and of the *Empress of Britain*. Again, though I am as much in love with indolence as any one alive, I cannot approve of the indolence of those passengers who lounge in deck chairs behind glass all day long, reading novels and books about the situation in Europe.

I have always thought that even in a railway train, though it is no sin to have a book in one's hand or on one's knee, it is a sin to pay more attention to the book than to the landscape on the other side of the window.

It is obvious, however, that I am in a minority on these matters, for, the more people travel by sea, the more they insist upon taking with them to sea as many as possible of the pleasures of life on land.

I myself succumbed to the cinema one afternoon, but that was on our one wet day. I

admit that I broke my principles by playing two games of shuffleboard, but that was more for the novelty of the thing than because I am a shuffleboard addict. Apart from these lapses, however, I can honestly boast that, as far as possible, I avoided all forms of mental and physical exertion during the voyage.

My reward came on the third day, when whales began to spout in the distance. They were so far away that, if the sea had been rough, I might not have noticed them, for the white of their spoutings would probably have been inconspicuous in a foaming sea.

No doubt there are lovelier things in nature than whales spouting in the distance, but I had always wanted to see a whale and I doubt whether there is anybody who would feel that the day on which he had seen his first whale had been entirely wasted. There is something very gratifying in having seen one of the famous monsters of the world.

I am not so sure about icebergs. If icebergs could be melted artificially, I think I should advocate melting the whole fleet of them as soon as they leave the Pole. Yet there is excitement in seeing one's first iceberg. When people rose from their tables towards the end

of dinner and hurried to the portholes on hearing that an iceberg was visible, it would have been impossible for a novice not to join in the rush and not to feel a certain elation at sight of the great bulk rising from the sea, grim as a battleship in the last light of the day.

Scarcely had we caught sight of the iceberg when everything outside the ship, iceberg and all, was lost in a chilly fog.

I took the lift up to the lounge deck and peered out into the darkness through the glass. † heard an American saying to his wife: 'It would take a pretty big berg to hurt this ship, I guess.' That ought to have sounded cheering, but somehow, followed as it was by the blare of the foghorn, it didn't. It was much more reassuring to hear a cheery steward explaining: 'There 's more danger from eating ice-creams than from meeting icebergs in these days.'

As there was nothing to be seen from the deck, I turned into the Knickerbocker Bar, where an Englishman with a profoundly disconsolate expression was examining a Canadian about the licensing laws of the Dominion.

'You mean to tell me,' he said, 'that there isn't a single public-house from one end of Canada to the other?'

'We have beer houses,' the Canadian told him, 'but no public-houses—nowhere where you can get a whisky and soda.'

'My hat,' said the Englishman.

The foghorn groaned in sympathy.

'You can join a club in some of the hotels and get it that way,' continued the Canadian, 'or you can get a Government licence and buy a bottle to take home.'

'But what about your railway trains?' asked the Englishman. 'Can you get a drink on the trains?'

'No, there 's no drink on the trains,' said the Canadian.

'My hat!' said the Englishman; 'and I 'm going to Vancouver.' Again the foghorn uttered an agonized groan.

'You can take some in a bag,' the Canadian said encouragingly.

'But I understand,' another Englishman observed, 'that you have to be very careful going through Saskatchewan. Some of these farmers are said to be very Puritanical.'

'No, the farmers won't worry you,' laughed the Canadian.

'They 'd better not try,' said the Englishman; and, folding his arms, he sat plunged in

gloom as the ship made her way slowly and cacophonously through the dense fog.

How pleasant to wake up in the morning into a world of bright sunshine! The first thing that one saw through the porthole after rising was a distant iceberg looking like a farmstead made of snow in the middle of the blue waters. One iceberg after another followed, giving the impression of the finish of a yacht race at Cowes.

The last of them, which was only about two hundred yards away when we passed it, was a noble structure, with a wash of brilliant green water frothing round its base.

'He 's a beauty,' said the Englishman enthusiastically, forgetting all about the licensing laws of Canada.

And so for two more days through sunshine and blue seas into the Gulf of St Lawrence and up the river, with its wooded hilly shore like the coast of Kirkcudbright. And at last the heights of Quebec.

Certainly, in good weather, the Atlantic with its inlets is a very fine ocean. If it did not take so long to cross, I should be tempted to cross it oftener.

XVII. MAN ON THE SPOT

WRITING on behalf of 'a large number of the persons who really know and understand Spain on account of their long residence in and connection with the country,' a correspondent deplores 'these so-called "missions" of M.P.s, clerics, etc.,' and the fact that their reports and opinions 'carry much more weight than their knowledge and experience of Spain would seem to merit.'

The antipathy felt by the man who really knows a country to the man who only visits it is an old story. Rudyard Kipling expressed it vigorously both in verse and in prose. How he hated the travelling English M.P. in India who refused to look at everything through officially provided spectacles! The Kipling theory was, apparently, that the best thing an M.P. could do was to stay at home and, so far as India was concerned, *trust* the man on the spot. This is unfortunately not nearly so simple as it sounds. There are so many people on the spot in most countries, and they do not all say the same thing. In Kipling's India, for example, there were millions of Indians on the spot, whom

Kipling himself would have hated to see you trusting. He called on you to trust only the white man on the spot, and, in order to be trusted, the white man on the spot had to be a White Man in the full sense of the words.

While agreeing that the man on the spot is well worth listening to, I have never been able to regard him as a superman. And, indeed, I doubt whether those who are always singing his praises trust him except when it suits their convenience to do so. Take England, for example. Would young Tories trust Mr Shaw as a guide in English politics merely because he has been on the spot a great deal longer than any of them? If not, why not? If being on the spot makes a man wise, the longer he is on the spot the wiser he is likely to become. The trouble is, of course, that even men who have been on the spot for the same length of time do not necessarily agree. One man, having lived in England for eighty years, thinks the country has gone to the dogs: another man, having lived in England for eighty years, thinks things have improved out of all recognition. Englishmen on the spot cannot even agree as to whether modern youth is, like the London police, simply wonderful, or, like the cooking

in English hotels, simply dreadful. As a recent correspondence showed, they cannot even agree as to whether the cooking in English hotels is the vilest on earth or the best. If you trusted all the men on the spot on any question in England, your brain would go round like a teetotum.

Men on the spot in democratic countries live in a constant state of peaceful civil war. They fight each other in Parliamentary elections and municipal elections, and, when there is no election going on, they fight each other on all sorts of committees. In politics, especially, the man on the spot is the very person who tells you the other man on the spot is not to be trusted. Ask Lord Beaverbrook to trust Sir Stafford Cripps as the man on the spot, and he will reply that Sir Stafford is not so much the man on the spot as the man who should be put on the spot. And Mr Ramsay MacDonald would fare as badly at the hands of Mr Gallacher. To be on the spot may inspire confidence in India, but in England it is often regarded as a proof of incompetence and ignorance.

If long residence—even lifelong residence—in England does not give a man the right to be accepted as an authority on English affairs, how,

then, can a much shorter residence in Spain give a man the right to be accepted as an authority on Spanish affairs? Even Spaniards who have been in Spain much longer than any English resident in Spain differ violently—if the expression is not too mild—as to the facts of the present situation. It is of no use for an English resident in Spain to say: 'I know, for I was there when it all began. After the murder of So-and-So, civil war was the only thing possible.' For no sooner has one heard this than another man on the spot, a Spaniard, tells one: 'Ah, yes! I was there too, and I can assure you that So-and-so was killed as a punishment for having organized the murder of Somebody Else.' It is not only the visitor to Spain, but the man on the spot, who speaks with two voices on the inevitable but unanswerable question: 'Who began it?' I ought not, perhaps, to call the question unanswerable, since there are two answers, each of them uttered by many people with passionate conviction. My point is, however, that the two answers flatly contradict each other, and that they both come from the lips of persons who possess all the qualifications of men on the spot.

Apart from this, residence in a foreign country

does not necessarily make a man a good judge of the best interests of the country. Many a man, residing in a foreign country for purposes either of business or pleasure, is, naturally enough, concerned most of all with the way in which the politics of the country affect his own interests. There were English residents in Italy who welcomed Fascism because, though it robbed the Italian democrat of his liberty of speech and action, it secured them a punctual train-service. It is not probable that the foreign resident or ex-resident in Spain is in all cases more disinterested.

I am not suggesting that residence in a foreign country is useless as a help to understanding its people and its problems. To do so would be to cast doubt on the value of experience, and to declare that all the books that have been written on France, England, America, Germany, Italy, and Russia by foreign residents are not worth the paper on which they are printed. It would be to abandon hope of one nation's ever being able to understand another in the slightest degree. I maintain, however, that, since even the opinion of a native of a country cannot be taken on trust, much less can the opinion of a foreign resident be taken on trust. You

cannot be sure of finding out the truth about the Means Test in England by talking to the Englishman who happens to be sitting beside



HE MAY BE A FOOL, OR A POLITICIAN

you in the Tube. He may be a fool, or a politician, or a man who does not care what happens so long as taxation doesn't increase. In the same way, it is no use trying to find out the truth about Spain from the first man

you meet who happened to be living in Madrid in the middle of last summer. Unless he is intelligent and disinterested, his opinion is not worth a button. An intelligent and disinterested man can learn more about Spain in London in a week than an unintelligent and self-interested man can learn by living in Spain for twenty years.

The same test holds good, of course, for foreign visitors as for foreign residents. It has often been said that the foreign visitor to a country sees only what he goes out to see, and, though this is not always true, it is fairly often true. We travel in search of corroborative detail for our prejudices. The Fascist, setting out for Germany, takes with him a vision of something approximating to the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome, and he is as much on guard against losing his vision while he is there as against losing his passport. He returns home joyfully in possession both of the vision and of the passport. Similarly, the Communist, setting out for Russia, has in his mind's eye the picture of a country in which (as a misprinting compositor once put it) a 'happy fireside clinic for weans and wife' has become the possession of all, and he returns from Russia with the report of a fairyland in

the making. If by chance his report betrays loss of vision, this is put down to lack of vision, and he is dismissed as a weaker brother, an incompetent observer, or even a renegade.

It seems, then, that neither residing in a country nor visiting a country is of much good in finding out the truth about it—a pessimistic conclusion. So pessimistic indeed, that, pessimist though I am for the moment, I should hesitate to subscribe to it. I am at least optimist enough to believe that one person in a hundred who has resided in or visited a country can talk intelligently and disinterestedly about it. (*He* must, of course, have prejudices in its favour, because unless you have prejudices in favour of a country or a cause, you cannot see the best of it, you cannot even understand it. But he must also have a double mind which, while it is steeped in prejudice, can at the same time free itself from prejudice in the interest of truth—a thing I, for one, have always found it most difficult to do even in private. The man we should really trust, I am convinced, is not the man on the spot, but the man on the spot with the double mind. It is to men on the spot with one-track minds that half the world's miseries are due.



XVIII. CHANGING ONE'S MIND

LORD BALFOUR towards the end of his life told his niece, Mrs Dugdale (who has written his biography), that, looking back, he could remember having changed his opinion about scarcely anything. When I read this, I could not help wondering whether he was to be envied or not. Nothing surely could make a man more serenely happy than to feel that in the crises of his own or his country's life he was nearly always right. You may think that this would lead to complacency, but complacency, though widely condemned by the moralists, is at least a very agreeable sensation. The man who has never seen cause for changing his

opinions lives in the sunshine of his own rightness, and this is reflected in his disposition. Even in the hour of defeat, it is something to know that one is right. In the hour of victory, it is intoxicating—at times almost fatally so.

Yet who that has changed one of his opinions after another looks back longingly to the opinions he has abandoned? Most of us are inclined to congratulate ourselves rather on having escaped from folly into wisdom. We look back to our early tastes in literature, for example, and feel no regret in having got rid of a good number of them. There are, I suppose, people who are born with perfect taste—who never worshipped an idol with feet of clay—but they are rare even among the fastidious. For, especially when one is young, there are all sorts of reasons for enjoying books that have nothing to do with good taste. If one is a pious child, one can enjoy a poorly enough written story about the dying ten-year-old son of a burglar, at the end of which the hard heart of the parent melts into a Christian softness. I have been moved by many such stories, and thought them better literature at the age of ten than I think them now. I have also changed my opinion about the excellence of penny dreadfuls, and I do not

rate Marie Corelli and Hall Caine quite so high as I rated them in the early 'nineties. Kipling became a god to me for half a dozen years; then, chiefly for political reasons, he became a vulgar rhetorician; finally, passions having cooled, I could enjoy his humour and his imaginative energy and cease to care what his opinions on politics were. This, I think, is a normal process in our taste for books. (We come to lose interest in what we once loved passionately, and we come to love passionately what once bored us.

I remember how many attempts I made to read *David Copperfield* before I could get on with it. Even though I had liked others of Dickens's novels, I found *David Copperfield* heavy going. I persevered, however, and suddenly one day broke through into an enchanted world. When once you are converted to *David Copperfield*, I doubt whether you can ever change your opinion about it again. To the end of life it remains one of the six greatest novels. I found no similar need to change my opinion about Scott and Thackeray; I liked them from the beginning, and though I no longer like them so extravagantly, I still hate to hear them belittled. Jane Austen, on the other hand—what girlish

stuff she seemed to be to a schoolboy just learning to smoke in the prime, so to speak, of manhood! It took me a long time to enjoy the niceties of Jane Austen.

Looking back, indeed, I see my life as one long series of changes of opinion. I remember when I thought the verse of Mr W. B. Yeats all but nonsense, and how it was succeeded by a time when I worshipped him. I remember the ecstasy and, after that, the boredom, of reading Swinburne. I remember when Emerson changed from a prophet into one of the great unread. (One cannot help feeling a little sad at times at the thought of all the great writers one has deserted. (One feels that one owes a certain loyalty to writers who once lit up the world for one, and that there is an element of treachery in neglecting them. How pleasant it is to open one of their books now and then, and to be able to feel, while re-reading it: 'Yes, he 's good—not so good as I once thought him, but still good.' But even then, the old rapture can seldom be rekindled. Whitman, Emerson, and Carlyle—they remain men of genius, but not on the old gigantic scale. That, perhaps, is the penalty of having mingled didacticism with literature. We become sated with

the teaching till we have no more appetite for it. Even Swinburne was in his way a teacher—a teacher of Victorian heresies. His teaching intensified the rapture of his disciples and the weariness of those who came after them. Much the same thing occurred in regard to the paintings of G. F. Watts. Men who found inspiration in him in the 'nineties now look for it in vain. Time has changed their opinions for them. The great teacher has vanished, and a great enough painter does not remain to make up for the loss.

It is obvious, of course, that our present opinions about once-loved writers and painters to whom we have turned Laodicean may be as wrong as we think our former opinions were. They may be due not to the improvement of our taste but to our fickleness. At the same time, we cannot help believing that our present opinions are right. We are as complacent as the most consistent Conservative. Exalted by our latest opinion, we feel like a man who, having missed the way again and again, has found the right way at last. You will notice this in some cases of religious conversion. I once knew a man who passed from Methodism to Atheism, and from Atheism to Unitarianism,



INSPIRATION IN THE 'NINETIES

and from Unitarianism to Catholicism, and who was equally confident at each stage that by changing his opinions he had found truth at last. He regarded me as hopelessly stupid when he vainly tried to thrust Ingersoll down my throat, and he afterwards regarded me as equally stupid when he fruitlessly assaulted me with quotations from Newman's *Grammar of Assent*. It would have been useless to say to him: 'You admit that you were wrong before. You may be wrong again.' Few people believe in the possibility of their being wrong again.

In this respect, I am as complacent as any one. At least, in matters of politics. I have changed my political opinions a number of times and never once had I the slightest doubt that my new creed was as patently true as an axiom in Euclid. Who that has ever experienced the raptures of Liberal Unionism can fail to remember what an inspired gospel it seemed? Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive. From that I passed on and became what I called an Imperialist Russellite Socialist. I was confident that if everybody else became an Imperialist Russellite Socialist—and I saw no reason except their blindness to argument why other people should not do so—the world would be trans-

formed and we should all settle down to the enjoyment of liberty, equality, and fraternity, while the organ in the Ulster Hall played *Rule Britannia*. Veering somewhat in my opinions, I then became an International Nationalist, and I can assure you that once more J was vehemently convinced that I was right. I did not care twopence what I had believed in the past. I had now found the key to the world's salvation.

Unfortunately, I have not Mr Gladstone's lifelong capacity for conversion, and I cannot experience the ecstasy of being converted to any of those new creeds that have burst into existence during my middle age. I see all about me, however, younger men and women undergoing the marvellous experience of conversion, and I cannot but wonder whether, from a purely hedonistic view, they are not even more to be envied than the changeless Lord Balfour. To go through life without ever being converted to anything seems a mark of insensitiveness. The ideal world would be a world in which everybody was capable of conversion and in which at the same time the converts would admit the possibility that they might be mistaken. That, unfortunately, is

impossible. It is of the essence of conversion, or change of opinion, that the convert should know that he is absolutely and indubitably right. I myself sometimes wish that the people who are not sure that they are right would form a league to control the people who know that they are right and turn this splendid knowledge to the world's advantage. But then I have reached a point at which I am not sure that my latest opinion is right. I do not even feel sure that my opinion that my latest opinion may not be right is right.

XIX. AUNTS

I HAVE had a charming letter from a lady reproaching me because recently, in making a list of classes of human beings whom everybody agrees to make fun of, I omitted to mention the long-suffering class to which she herself belongs.

'Why,' she asks me, 'when writing of the caricatured, did you leave out the most universal and innocent victim of odious jokes—I mean aunts? A peer can drop his title, like B. R., a workman drop his job and go on the dole; but we—what can we do? If you are a parent or a husband, it is your own fault, but surely no one is an aunt by choice. . . . Every week we are represented in pictures and print as either silly old sentimental noodles, afraid to cross the street with our dogs and cats, or detestable, cross killjoys, giving or getting mean and incongruous presents and paying unwished-for and uninvited visits.] Why, indeed, should we be all Aunt Sallies, just to be thrown insults at? Why Aunt, not Mother or Mrs or Lady,

Sally? For my own part, I have little to complain of. The numerous clan to whom I am aunt treat me with civil indifference—some even go so far as to appear to regard me as one of themselves—of course, the greatest of compliments. When rather puffed up with this condescension, I remember that being easily taken in is the mark of all my tribe and debunk myself.'

When I read this, my first impulse was to make a collection of all the nice things that have been written about aunts and to send them to the lady for her consolation. For this purpose I took down Sir Gurney Benham's *Book of Quotations* and opened it at the index. My eye fell on a column of references to 'Angels.' 'Ah,' I thought, 'if there are all these references to angels, there must be still more references to those angels in human form—aunts.' What was my astonishment on turning to the word 'Aunt' to find that there were only two references to aunts in the whole dictionary. One of them ran: 'If my aunt had been a man, she 'd have been my uncle.' The other, apparently a translation of a German proverb, ran: 'If my aunt had wheels, she would be an omnibus.' Neither of these proverbs can be

said to be derogatory to aunts, but, on the other hand, neither of them is a compliment of the kind of which I was in search.

I then turned to the index of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Alas, the only aunt who gets a section to herself in the *Encyclopaedia* is Aunt Sally: 'a grotesque female figure' with a pipe stuck in her mouth or her forehead—as like a real aunt as I to Hercules. There is one other aunt mentioned in the index—the Aunt Judy of *Aunt Judy's Magazine*, a children's magazine edited by Mrs Gatty. "'Aunt Judy,'" we are told, 'was the nickname given by her daughter, Juliana Horatia Ewing.' One cannot help wondering whether it was the young Juliana's retort discourteous to the names that had been given to herself in baptism.

Have aunts, then, never been estimated at their true worth? Has the truth never been told about them in print? I have a chaotic memory for literature, and it may be that there have been more famous eulogies of aunts than I can remember. I can remember but two. First, there is that splendid Aunt Jobiska who looked after the welfare of the Pobble Who Had No Toes—who gave him lavender water tinged with pink, and who 'made him

a feast, at his earnest wish, of eggs and butter-cups fried with fish,' combining the virtues of a good nurse and a fairy godmother. Equally perceptive as a tribute to auntship are Robert Louis Stevenson's lines, *To Auntie*:

*Chief of my aunts—not only I
But all your dozen of nurslings cry—
What did the other children do ?
And what were childhood, wanting you ?*

That, it seems to me, is the way in which every nephew should address his aunt. Yet you would imagine from their writings that most men of letters had never had such a relation.

Even Lamb, despite his profoundly affectionate nature, never quite understood the essential golden-heartedness of aunts. He begins well: 'I had an aunt, a dear and a good one,' but he goes on disappointingly: 'She was one whom single blessedness had soured to the world.' His Aunt Sarah cuts a rather grotesque figure as she irritates Mr Billett at table by pressing a second helping of pudding on him in the sentence: 'Do take another slice, Mr Billett, for you do not get pudding every day.' 'The old gentleman,' writes Lamb, 'said nothing at the time—but he took occasion in the course of the evening, when some argument had inter-

vened between them, to utter with an emphasis which chilled the company, and which chills me now as I write it—"Woman, you are superannuated." ' Had Lamb been a more loyal nephew, he would have drawn a veil over a scene in which his aunt met merely with insult and humiliation as a reward for her reckless hospitality with the pudding.

Outside literature, I am sure, most of us are devoted to our aunts. I have never met one of those Gorgon aunts whom Mr P. G. Wodehouse has invented for the chastisement of Bertie Wooster and Ukridge. Some of my earliest memories are of going down into the country and being met at the railway station by an aunt of the angelic order who drove me to my grandfather's farm. How delighted she seemed to see me! How expertly she held the reins! What an entrancing world she seemed to live in as she talked! How beautiful sounded her laughter! And, at the door of the farmhouse, another aunt was waiting to greet us, making us feel with her welcome that we had arrived at the capital of earthly bliss. The tea that followed increased, if possible, the illusion of being in paradise. To be young among three kinds of jam, four kinds of baked bread, and all

manner of cakes, including slim-cake, was certainly something approaching very heaven. It is one of the great virtues of aunts that they have no scruples about encouraging one to overeat at an age at which one is able to overeat. How often have I felt like a purring cat at the sound of those blessed words: 'You 're eating nothing, Y,' and gone on valiantly with another farl of hot and delicious bakery trebly fortified with home-made strawberry jam!

Nor did this lavish hospitality cease with tea. Before going to bed, those treasures from tins—animal biscuits and letter biscuits—appeared on the table with milk that even a town child could realize was, unlike most milk, something to store in a gourmet's memory; and, if I ate through the entire Noah's Ark and the alphabet, there was none to say me nay. I shall always associate aunts with animal biscuits and letter biscuits. What finer compliment could we pay any one than that?

There is something in the relationship between aunts and their nephews and nieces that is quite unlike any other. In the company of their aunts, nephews and nieces know that they are privileged persons. The bonds of duty are somehow relaxed : they have no obligations but

to be happy. They have, in the country, the freedom of the farmyard and the freedom of the fields, which is considerably nearer heaven than the freedom of the streets or the freedom of a town garden. They are permitted to feed hens and to collect eggs, and to ride horses to the drinking-pond, and to talk on equal terms with those mighty men, farm-labourers. I never knew an aunt to interfere with my happiness except on Sunday, when it was generally thought to be a sin to go into the fruit-garden and eat gooseberries. It was in accordance with the Ten Commandments to eat gooseberries from a dish in the house but not to eat them from a bush. Even then, when in a state of revolt I would entangle one of my aunts in a theological argument at the tea-table and counter her appeal to the name of John Knox with the passionate declaration: 'John Knox was a scoundrel,' she would turn aside my blasphemy with angelic forgiveness and tell me a fascinating, if harrowing, story about the death of Voltaire. I knew nothing about either Knox or Voltaire, but I resented not being able to go out to the gooseberries. Ungracious boy! Had I forgotten that that very afternoon I had been given a shilling for learning by heart

the rhymed version of the shortest of the Psalms ?

Looking back, I can see that there is nothing but good to be said of aunts. They have at once the intimacy of relations and the charm of strangers. *They* are grown up and yet without authority. They are perfect conversationalists. And they give animal biscuits to their nephews and nieces.

Why men took to jeering at them I cannot imagine. I think it can be explained only by the innate and cynical anti-feminism of most of our sex. As for myself, I would rather have missed St Peter's and the Louvre and the Prado and the Pavilion at Brighton than the noble and two-shilling-bit-giving galaxy of my aunts. I suspect I must be one of Nature's nephews.

XX. LOOKING FOR A BEAR

I HAVE been in the Rocky Mountains more than a week, and I have not seen a bear except in a cage.

At first, I did not much want to see a bear. When I asked him about bears, one of the wisest men in Montreal said to me: 'Canadians say that they are not dangerous, but bears are always dangerous. Never trust a bear, Mr Lynd.' I promised him unhesitatingly that I wouldn't.

Still, when one is in a country, one likes to see what other people have seen; and, as I wandered through western Canada, I grew a little jealous as one person after another boasted to me of having seen wolves, lynxes, bears, elks, Rocky Mountain goats, and half the wild creatures that you see behind bars at the Zoo. As I drove through the spruce forests among the mountains, I kept my eyes open for bears among the trees, and even began to half-hope that one or more of them would appear.

Taking a hairpin-bend drive up a mountain,

I asked the chauffeur if he ever saw bears along that route. 'Oh, lots,' he said. 'Here 's where you usually see them,' he added; and we got out and peered down a steep green slope in the forest, where not even a chipmunk was stirring.

'This is the wrong time of day to see them,' he explained after we had peered for a long time in vain. 'We run a special twilight drive for visitors when the bears are about. The visitors bring candies, and on some of the roads in the evening you 'll see the bears stopping the cars so's the motorists 'll give them candies.'

That, I confess, is not my notion of a bear. I like a bear to be really wild—so wild that he abhors humanity and would run for his life at sight of me. I have little more interest in a candy-begging bear than in a bear at the Zoo. I felt almost like saying: 'Give me a grizzly. He, at least, does not scrounge for candy.' But I did not say it for fear a grizzly might actually appear.

The truth is, I like animals to be both wild and harmless to the spectator. How charming is the chipmunk—that little dark squirrelish creature with the white stripes and the pleasant rat-face—as he climbs the stems of flowers at

Lake Louise for his food! How attractive are those little biscuit-coloured ground-squirrels, the gophers, that run across the road between Banff and Calgary like weasels!

I counted myself lucky, again, when, one day, towards evening, driving from Windermere to Banff—how odd the names sound in Canada!—I saw several moose, an elk, a red deer, and beavers swimming in the dam round their house.

The moose—either a cow or a young bull—was drinking its fill at eve as we approached. We slowed down and came to a standstill at the edge of the pool before the moose saw us. It turned its head, glanced at us, despised us, and went on drinking. 'Ugly brute,' said a Canadian artist who was sitting beside me; and certainly no human being with so monstrous a mouth would be called beautiful even in central Africa. Again and again the dark-bodied beast turned its head to look at us, decided to ignore us, and continued to drink till its thirst was satisfied. Then it moved slowly away, just as you or I would move slowly away from a savage bull, and rejoined a more nervous companion that had been hiding restlessly among the trees.

How strange it is that an animal—even a comparatively ugly animal—seen for the first time, seems a greater wonder than mountains that are themselves one of the world's wonders! I could gaze at these limestone mountains for hours—mountains that are beautiful in all changing lights—sometimes all but as white as the cliffs of Dover—in the evening, flushed with sunlight and pied with shadows—barren, austere, majestic—and yet I constantly find myself scanning their scarred sides and the spruce-forests along the rivers in the hope of catching sight of some relatively insignificant living creature—a bear, an elk, or an eagle!

Unhappily, the commonest living creature to be seen in the Rocky Mountains by the hurrying traveller is the motorist. Sometimes, when you meet him at a sharp bend on the wrong side of the road above a precipice, he is an even more disagreeable surprise than a grizzly bear. If 'Never trust a bear' is sound advice in the Rockies, 'Never trust a motorist' is even sounder.

The comparative inconspicuousness of animal life, however, makes the sight of a red deer drinking from a river-bank all the more exhilarating. The elk, too, golden in the evening

sun, has a rarity value as it stoops its antlered head to the flowing water. Looking down from a height to a small lake where a bull-moose is wading and quenching his thirst, one feels something of the excitement of a discoverer.

An animal, however, that you can always be sure of seeing towards sunset is the beaver. His flattish tent-shaped house of sticks and mud is by the side of the road, and motorists pull up for a sight of him. 'There 's one,' you hear someone exclaim. 'You see that thing looking like a log of wood.' You look, and see a long creature all but submerged, swimming as though he found some difficulty in keeping his head above water.

He suddenly dives and disappears. Another larger beaver is seen swimming along one of the channels of the dam. He hoists himself out on to the bank like a drenched black pig and begins grubbing among the greenery and nibbling the bark of tree-stumps. 'Isn't he sweet?' says an enthusiastic lady. He is at least a highly satisfying sight to any one who has never seen a beaver in his natural surroundings before.

Then there is the osprey, or fishing-eagle, that has built his huge nest on the top of a tree

at Vermilion Lake. His young flap their as yet incompetent wings and raise their beaks for food, while the parent bird sits apart on the tip of a bare branch that you would think



SHRINERS DURING MIGRATION SEASON

would break under his weight. He remains motionless, as if absorbed in a dream of fish, while motor-coaches stop in order that Shriners may stare at him.

For the Rockies this week are full of Shriners. The Shriner, I should explain to the ignorant, is a Freemason, who wears a brilliant red fez

with a black tassel, his fez bearing some such inscription as 'Rameses, Potentate,' or 'Medinah, Band.' He wears his fez even at meals in hotels. A motor-coach filled with him and his wives brings a splash of unexpected brilliant colour into the grey and green atmosphere of the Rockies. He is usually plump and middle-aged, always gay, always talking and laughing, and always ready to look at anything like an osprey or a beaver for five seconds.

I may have missed seeing a bear, but it has been some compensation to see a Shriner during the migration season. He is, next to the humming bird, the most brilliant thing I have seen in Canada.

XXI. LEGS

'THE man who doesn't use his legs is on his way to Harley Street,' said Sir George Tilly, speaking at a lunch given to celebrate the production of a new film, *The Health of the Nation*. 'Modern city life,' he assured his fellow-lunchers, 'with all its contrivances for making legs superfluous, is the enemy of fitness.' And, having applauded these excellent sentiments, the guests, I feel perfectly sure, departed to their homes or offices in a long stream of taxis and private cars. I should be surprised to hear that even two per cent of them covered so much as a mile on foot as a result of Sir George's warnings.

Walking is natural, but the love of walking is an acquired taste. What inventions man has sought out from the earliest times in order to avoid the need of ambulation! He tamed the horse, the ass, the camel, and the elephant as his carriers. He constructed vehicles of all shapes and sizes and attached them to horses in order that he might be able to go from place to place in a sitting position and save his legs

from exertion. He rejoiced when the age of steam enabled a larger and larger number of people to make long journeys seated. Then came the electric tram, the electric train, the motor-bus, and the motor-car, till we have now reached a point at which millions of human beings go sedentarily to their day's work in the morning and return sedentarily to their homes in the evening.

How seldom we envy anybody who is walking! What objects of envy, on the other hand, are and have always been those who are sitting in a moving vehicle! Sir Joshua Reynolds realized this when he advertised himself by going about in a carriage and pair. I confess that in my childhood I envied even the man who drove the baker's cart. I envied people in farm-carts as well as those in croydons, polo-carts, gigs, phaetons, school-carts, victorias, and hansoms ; and there seemed to be no bliss to compare with sitting on a side-car or a long-car on a country road. Sitting has by now become a habit with me, like smoking, so that I no longer get much positive pleasure from riding in taxis or even in the most luxurious motor-cars. Still, I suppose I must prefer it to walking, for I seldom walk.

I do not defend the general antipathy to walking. I mention it as a significant fact, not as something to be commended. I agree with every word that Sir George Tilly says as to the virtue of walking; but it is one thing to recognize virtue and another thing to practise it.

Doctors recommend walking as a form of exercise, and we so far agree with them as to have adopted the word 'constitutional' as a synonym for a walk. At the same time, we need to be ill or morbid before we can acquire the habit of taking a constitutional. To take a walk as if it were a pill is an insult to the face of Nature. I can conceive few things more indecorous than the behaviour of those people who take a walk in order to get an appetite for the Sunday dinner or who go out later in order to walk the effects of the dinner off. Is it for this the trees are coming into leaf and the birds have returned from Africa—to see a valetudinarian carrying an incompetent stomach about in the sunshine on a reluctant pair of legs? After all, it was the capacity to walk upright that set man—until fairly recently—above the beasts of the field. So noble a capacity ought not to be degraded to the level of a medicine-bottle. Walking should be done for walking's

sake or not at all. All the exercise that is needed for health can be got in the bedroom from a patent rowing-machine.

Even *so*, I cannot see eye to eye with those great walkers for walking's sake, William Hazlitt and Robert Louis Stevenson. To be so wrapped up in one's walking as to be, like them, unable to endure company on a walk is not my notion of happiness. I can appreciate the pleasure of being alone for a mile or an hour or even an afternoon, but to go striding along mile after mile, hour after hour, day after day, in solitude, without any one at one's side even to speculate as to 'what time they open' in the next village, is a height either of asceticism or of hedonism to which I could never rise. 'I laugh, I run, I leap, I sing for joy,' says Hazlitt of his moods as a solitary walker. This is a rough expression of moods of which I myself am much more conscious when sitting in a charabanc than when tramping alone along a road. Even Hazlitt, however, admitted that; there was one exception to the rule that company spoils a walk. 'I grant,' he wrote, 'there is one subject on which it is pleasant to talk on a journey, and that is, what we shall have for supper when we get to our inn at night.' A gloomy subject,

many who are acquainted with the food in English inns may think, but one welcomes any sign of weakening in so rigid a pedestrian.

As for Stevenson, he is even less human than Hazlitt in his theory of the proper use of the legs. He objects not only to company on a walk, but to those who take to walking as a means of seeing the country. 'There are,' he declares blandly, 'many ways of seeing landscape quite as good. . . . Landscape on a walking tour is quite accessory. He who is of the brotherhood does not voyage in quest of the picturesque, but of certain jolly humours—of the hope and spirit in which the march begins at morning and the peace and spiritual repletion of the evening's rest.'

It seems to me that, if the walker regards his legs as more important than his eyes as ministers to his happiness, he might as well do his walking on a cinder-track. In these days, indeed, there is much to be said for a cinder-track as an exercise-ground for the pedestrian. Here there are no motor-cars to punctuate his thoughts in the wrong places—no uncommon birds or flowers to bring him again and again to a standstill or to distract him from the spiritual joys of concentrated legwork.

It may be that I misunderstand the spirit of the true walker, and that my conception of a walk scarcely rises above a stroll. And the pleasure I get even from a stroll lies not in the strolling, but in things seen and heard by the way. I am much more likely to take a stroll in order to see whether the willow-wrens have arrived than for the purpose of filling my lungs with the wind on the heath. I should take a stroll to see the cherry trees in bloom in Buckinghamshire on days on which I should not walk a yard for pleasure in London. I am a born stroller in fact, always willing to walk a mile, or even two, to see anything that interests me, from the Atlantic Ocean to a gold-crest, from a cathedral to a chaffinch's nest. My chief complaint against London is that so much of it is not worth strolling in. If Sir George Tilly wishes town-dwellers to make more use of their legs, he should inaugurate a movement for making towns and cities more tempting to the eye. Make all London as beautiful as Church Row in Hampstead, and you will find hundreds of thousands of people who now use buses and trams walking to their shops and offices. Or, at least, you ought to.

The motorist, of course, has made the country

an impossible place for walking, except where there are field-paths or downs. The only safe way to see the country nowadays is from a sitting position in a car, and till we have a more auspicious state of affairs, it is difficult to believe that the mass of people will become leg-conscious. 'The man who does not use his legs,' says Sir George Tilly, 'is on his way to Harlev Street'; but the man who does use his legs, as everybody else knows, is quite as likely to be on his way to hospital. That is the dilemma of the modern man. If Hazlitt or Stevenson had written in these days of motor accidents, I cannot help thinking that a certain note of bitterness would have crept into those famous pieces of prose, *On Going a Journey* and *Walking Tours*. Mr Belloc himself, noblest of contemporary pedestrians, won his spurs as a walker, if the image is admissible, before petrol had conquered the world.

If, however, preferring a hospital to Harley Street, you must indulge in walking, be sure at least to keep in mind the advice of Hippocrates on the matter. 'Walking,' writes that great doctor, 'should be rapid in winter and slow in summer, unless it be under a burning heat. Fleishy people should walk faster, thin people

slower. . . . Fat people who wish to become thin should always fast when they undertake exertion, and take their food while they are panting and before they have cooled, drinking beforehand diluted wine that is not very cold.' If these instructions are strictly followed, even the fattest man ought to be able to use his legs to the advantage of his health unless he is knocked down by a motor-car while doing so. And, if he is knocked down by a motor-car, he will have the consolation of knowing that he fell in the cause of physical fitness and that at least he escaped the indignity and expense of a compulsory visit to Harley Street.



XXII. THE JOLLY ABSTAINER

THOUGH I have written more than once on the pleasures of abstinence, I never realized till lately how intoxicating those pleasures can *be*. I did not realize, for example, that to turn from wine to water was to exchange one heady stimulant for an even headier one. Pindar himself, though he affirmed that water is best, did not claim for it that it set a man carolling like a bird. Having been introduced, however, to a nineteenth-century song-book, called *Hoyle's Hymns and Songs for Temperance Societies and Bands*

of Hope, I now see that a man can become as merry a toper at the water-tap as at the beer-tap. This book is crammed with exhilarating drinking-songs. Consider the titles of some of them: *Drinking at the Rill*, *A Gay Little Band*, *Give me a Draught*, *Give me the Drink*, *I Drink with the Birds*, *The Jolly Abstainer*, *Merry Dick*, *Round the Spring*, *Water as it Gushes*, and *What Do All the Birds*. Even *Sober John* is a song, not about a gloomy ascetic, but about a man who believes that he has discovered a more enjoyable drink than gin:

Coming home, poor Jack I met the other day.
We passed a gin-shop where he wished me to stay.
But I said, 'No, never !

There 's a better way.

I drink bright sparkling water.'

That was the origin of John's discovery. By the time the chorus is reached, 'poor Jack' has become a life-addict of water and is merrily singing: 'My name 's Sober John, I keep marching on,' etc.

Presumably, it was Sober John who afterwards posed as the model for the anonymous Jolly Abstainer. The Jolly Abstainer was a fine hilarious fellow, as you may see from the song about him :

Success to the Jolly Abstainer.

A right worthy fellow is he.

He 's setting a nobler example

By living the life of the free.

Though drunkards with jesting revile him,

(*Slow*) While boasting the wine's ruddy light,

He pities their sin and their blindness,

(*Quick*) And sings 'I will drink water bright.

Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha!

And sings I will drink water bright,

Ha, ha!'

I have often protested against the theory that the Puritans are a gloomy race. I would not ask for better evidence on behalf of my opinion than that final 'Ha, ha!' of the Jolly Abstainer.

Take Merry Dick, again. Show me any marks of gloom in this grand lover of water and song:

Merry Dick you soon would know

If you lived in Jackson's Row;

Each day with a smiling face,

He is ready at his place;

Should you ever with him meet

In his shop or in the street,

You will find him blithe and gay,

Singing out this merry lay:

My drink is water bright,

Water bright, water bright.

My drink is water bright,

From the crystal spring.



'MY NAME 'S SOBER JOHN'

Now I contend on this evidence that Merry Dick became far more intoxicated on water than an ordinary shopkeeper gets on so-called intoxicating liquor. You do not find an ordinary shopkeeper, even after he has just had half a pint of bitter with his lunch, returning to his

shop and howling drinking-songs to his customers. What would you think of your grocer if you went into his shop to buy a pound of digestive biscuits and all you could get out of him was a husky rendering of *Beer, Beer, Glorious Beer* ? What would you think of him if you met him in the street and he laid his hand on your shoulder, and sang you *Here 's to the good old Whisky, drink it down*, ending with a burst of maniacal laughter ?, You would say the man was drunk. Yet that is more or less how Merry Dick behaved after a glass of water. And what I consider to be rather unpardonable in the man was that, not content with getting merry on water himself, he infected his whole family—'wife, three daughters, and a son'—with the same vice. I gather from the third verse of the song that the family ended by going about roaring drinking-songs at all sorts of times and in all sorts of places. To quote the poet:

In all seasons, cold or hot,
Storm or sunshine matters not,
Winter's snow or summer's rain,
Sing they all this merry strain:
My drink is water bright, etc.

I came in another part of the book on a song called *Drink from the Well*. I confess that, after

reading about the effect of water on Merry Dick and his family, I could not help wondering whether it would not be in the interests of public morality and order if Parliament were to pass a Bill ordering all wells to be closed.

As for *Drink from the Well*, itself, it will suggest that an excessive consumption of water, though it makes for hilarity, subtly but surely undermines the character. Was there ever a more dangerous incitement to self-seeking than we find in the first verse?

Right men are wanted high places to fill,

Men of good manners, wisdom and skill.

Drunkards can never attain to the prize.

We must be abstainers, for we all want to rise.

We all want to rise! A soulless sentiment. Who has ever heard a Bacchanalian poet commending wine on the ground that it helps us to get on in the world? Convinced though I am that water-drinkers are as jolly as wine-drinkers or even jollier, I cannot help thinking that they are more worldly. Has anything ever been written on a meaner moral plane than the verse:

Drunkards begin with a small glass or so,

None are secure but abstainers we know;

Health, time and money are talents we prize.

We must all be abstainers, for we all want to rise.

The drunkard, too, may want to rise, but not at the expense of his neighbour. His ambition is not worldly: in fact, it is purely domestic; he wants to rise only in order to go home.

The water-poet, indeed, admits as much in the song called *Joe Perkins*. When Joe fell, it was not, like the angels or the abstainers, through the sin of ambition. His desire to rise could be defended on moral grounds:

One night at the 'Crown and Anchor'
So jolly and strong was he,
And he tried to go, but his legs said 'No,
This night you must carried be!'
So he fell flat in the gutter,
Like a general down fell he;
For I do declare he was shouting there,
'Three cheers for the brave and free.'

'Like a general' is a rather unnecessary reflection on the army; but, apart from this, the picture of Joe Perkins makes one think well of human nature. 'He tried to go.' He was a home-lover. The spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak. And, even as he lay in the gutter, was he not one of those who look—or try to look—at the stars? I like to think of that last noble shout of his about the brave and

the free. Lying in the same posture, Merry Dick would have been self-centredly bawling something about his favourite drink being water.

I am sure that, when Joe was ultimately released from prison and became an abstainer, he did not go about singing ignoble songs like *Water pays the best*, but that his selfless mind turned rather to pretty nature-songs like *The Merry Birds*. How enchanting a picture the song-book gives us of those little teetotallers of the trees:

The merry birds in wood and grove,
They sing a Temp'ranee lay,
And water makes the richest flowers,
So beautiful and gay.

(Chorus) Then like the birds in wood and grove
And flowers so rich and gay,
I 'll drink of water from the spring
And sing a Temp'ranee lay.

If ever I sing 'a Temp'rance lay' it will certainly be due to the example of the birds. How sweetly they sing on water! None of the great nature-poets ever noticed this, but Mr Hoyle noticed it. As a result, he expressed something in Nature that Wordsworth never expressed.

Wordsworth with all his genius never wrote such a verse as:

Sweet bird, then let us ever
With thee in water find
A dear friend that shall never
My soul in fetters bind.
I 'll sign the pledge of temperance,
And every evil flee,
With thee in fond remembrance
My song of joy shall be.

There you have the poetry of abstinence at its finest.

Fine, too, is *Bright Water*, with its reminder that not only the birds but the heroes of the past must be counted in the ranks of the abstainers. How excellent is the verse about Samson :

Brave Samson was the strongest man
That ever lived in story.
He firmly kept the temperance plan,
And gained renown and glory.

(Chorus) Marching with the brave and free,
 Marching with the brave and free,
 Marching with the brave and free,
 In the happy temp'rance army.

Yes, whatever you may say about abstainers, they are a cheerful, high-spirited lot, with

songs to stir the heart. As I read Mr Hoyle's book I found myself wishing that Merry Dick, Joe Perkins, and one or two more of these abstainers could have had a night out with the characters in G. K. Chesterton's *Flying Inn*, to see which could sing loudest and longest. What vocal uproar there would have been, the one side drinking water and singing songs about Samson, and the other side drinking beer and singing songs about Noah! And who do you think would have maintained their high spirits best till the end of the evening? I, for one, am convinced that Merry Dick and Joe Perkins and their friends would have sung the *Flying Inn* men under the table.

XXIII. THE MOST POPULAR ANIMAL

'I SUPPOSE,' says Professor Julian Huxley in his introduction to *Songs of Wild Birds*, 'that birds give more pleasure and interest to humanity or at least give pleasure and interest to more human beings, than any other group of the animal kingdom—perhaps, more than all the other groups of the animal kingdom taken together.' That is probably true if we leave out the domesticated animals. If Professor Huxley includes domesticated animals in his generalization, however, I should be inclined to doubt whether—in this part of the world, at least—birds have given more human beings pleasure than cats. It is true that most of us do not love cats as a 'group.' If we love birds we love almost any bird. On the other hand, we may be devoted to one particular cat, and feel no affection at all for the other) members of his species that come to challenge him to combat among our flower-beds. We love cats as individuals: we love birds as a rule as a species. Our cat is not merely a cat: he is

Moth or Peter; but a willow-wren is only a willow-wren. Thus our attachment to a cat is permanent like our attachment to a human being. He enables us to enjoy the pleasure of individual affection. In spite of his never-ending declarations of independence, he flatters our possessive instinct. A bird seldom does this unless he actually builds his nest in our garden, and even then he is usually conscious of no bonds that unite him to us, not only through the joys of midsummer, but through the dark days of winter. The very blue-tits whom we have royally provided with coco-nuts come and go at their fancy. Possibly, it was this irritating faithlessness of the birds that first led men to put them into cages. A goldfinch outside a cage was not to be trusted.

Because of this untrustworthiness, it seems to me, the sentiment that unites a human being to a bird is less profound than the sentiment that unites him to a cat. And when I think of all the pleasure human beings get from the purrings of their cats and from their kittens at play I wonder whether this does not exceed in volume the pleasure they derive from watching and listening to birds. The dog-lover would raise a similar question about dogs, and the

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horse-lover about horses. Who can measure the happiness that the cat, the dog, and the horse have bestowed on the human race?

And yet, if we turn to the poets for evidence on the matter, we must admit that Professor Huxley is right. In the modern world at least there has been more poetry written about birds than about cats, dogs, and horses all put together. In presence of a bird the poet is in a trance of happiness: in presence of a cat, he seldom loses himself in an ecstasy. Like Gray, he remains humorously critical—proof that his pleasure is not of the supreme sort. Keats could not have written an ode to a cat in phrases as passionate as those he addressed to the nightingale. Perhaps it is the cat's voice that makes such ecstatic celebration difficult. Shelley, again, however much he might have loved dogs, could never have hailed a dog in images so lovely as those in which he hailed a skylark. I conclude from this that there is a prosaic element in our love of cats and dogs. They give us what might be called fireside pleasures, whereas the birds give us the pleasures of an earthly paradise.

I am sure, none the less, that there are more people who love cats and dogs than people who

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love birds. If people loved birds as the poets have loved them, the ordinary man would take more trouble to acquaint himself with their names and their songs. The ordinary man cannot, I am convinced, tell a martin from a

birds by sight or song—I mean that I could not identify them—till I was in my thirties.

Then came sudden conversion. I began to peer into hedges and trees and to pore over bird-books. I longed to know all the members of the family of the tits. I pricked my ears to distinguish between the songs of the garden-warbler and the blackcap. I counted the day on which I saw a black redstart a red-letter day. The rumour of a kingfisher's presence in the neighbourhood would keep me questing for days. I would drive as far to see a Dartford warbler as to see Fountains Abbey. And so, despite the laziest of constitutions, it remains. When I was in Canada, the prospect of seeing a humming-bird excited me more than the prospect of seeing the Rocky Mountains. I am still largely an ignoramus about birds, but I have not lapsed from my conversion. The convert to bird-watching seldom lapses.

Yet his path is strewn with difficulties. Birds seem deliberately to hide from him: unless he has a great deal of spare time, or someone to guide him, it may be years before he is able to see a wood-wren's throat vibrating with song. The bird-books themselves are not always helpful. Lord Kennet, in his delightful book,

A Bird in the Bush, complains that he has never read a book about birds which gave a description of their songs that would enable the reader to identify them. I have happier memories of bird-books than he, but, even so, until the gramophone was invented, it was not possible to tell an ignorant man what a bird's song sounded like in the same degree as it was possible to tell him what the bird looked like. The new convert to ornithology will find little in the books to enable him to distinguish between a blackcap and a garden-warbler by ear alone.

In *Songs of Wild Birds*, the authors, Mr E. M. Nicholson and Mr Ludwig Koch, have devised a new method of training the ear to identify bird-songs. They have enclosed their book in a box and accompanied it with two gramophone records reproducing the songs of several of the birds, including the nightingale and the hedge-sparrow or (as they call it, alas!) the dunnock. There have been gramophone records of bird-song before, but none, I think, so good as these, or used for the same purpose as 'illustrations' to a book. This kind of book, I imagine, is the bird-book of the future. It is only a beginning, but we can now look forward

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confidently to the production of a bird-book, containing a text as good as Coward's, beautiful coloured plates, and perfect reproductions of the songs of all the British birds on gramophone records. All that will be needed in addition will be a map showing the localities where, say, nightingales and Dartford warblers are to be found. But that map, I fancy, will never be made, or, if it is, it will be privately printed for distribution among approved ornithologists sworn to secrecy.

Even the selection of gramophone records, however, will present some difficulties, since some birds sing differently in different regions. The chaffinch, for example, is said to sing with a different accent in Worcestershire and in Donegal, and 'the Rev. E. Peake considers that Berkshire chaffinches have more of a burr in the early part of their song than those in the Craven districts of Yorkshire, while in Huntingdonshire, on the fen side, the ending is always dropped.' This complicates matters. In order not to offend local feeling we shall have to have records of chaffinches singing with a broad Yorkshire accent, dropping their aitches in London, introducing 'z' sounds in Somerset, and so forth. The wren probably trills its 'r's'

more in Scotland than in Sussex, and there may be a touch of the brogue in the caw of an Irish rook. I confess that this theory that the birds, like ourselves, have their local dialects gives me great pleasure. It suggests that the bird-lover has before him a world of infinite possibilities of new discoveries. Meanwhile, the initiate discoverer will find *Songs of Wild Birds* a very admirable book with which to set out on his quest.

XXIV. THE HUMMING-BIRD

WITHIN twenty-four hours, in Vancouver Island, I have stared at the Pacific, I have stared at Mr R. B. Bennett, and I have stared at a humming-bird. Impressive to the eye though I found both the Pacific and Mr Bennett, I confess that I thought the humming-bird a greater world's wonder than either of them.

In my ignorance of the British Empire, its geography, its politics, its economics, its fauna and its flora, I had never dreamed that humming-birds were to be found in Canada. Still less did I dream that they were to be found in that part of Canada called British Columbia, which everybody had told me was just like England.

It was at Montreal that I first learnt the truth, and this, more than anything else, reconciled me to the prospect of the four or five days' journey across the continent, serpentining round Lake Superior, speeding across the prairie, and rocking through the clefts of the Rocky Mountains.

During the journey we seemed to stop at

every possible station to be greeted by the mayor of the town, the inhabitants, and the local band, for we were celebrating the jubilee of the arrival of the first C:P.R. train at Vancouver City. At one station we were given seats on a wooden platform while the mayor and inhabitants joined in a lusty welcoming chorus, 'Hail, hail, the gang 's all here,' but, good though this was, I felt that all this oratorical and musical business was merely holding up the train that was taking me to see a humming-bird.

Arrived at Vancouver City, I made inquiries and was told that the humming-bird's favourite flower was the rose; and, as a result of this, I wasted an afternoon looking at roses in Stanley Park. Disappointed in my quest, I took ship for Victoria, which, you who are as ignorant as myself may not know, is the capital of British Columbia, is situated on Vancouver Island, and takes four or five hours to reach by steamer from Vancouver City.

In the grounds of the Empress Hotel I found a lovely rose-garden, and again I wasted more hours than I like to think of looking at roses. But the only bird that appeared was the large Canadian robin, which does its best to sing the

first notes of a thrush, scuttles like a black-bird, and is as fearless and as red-breasted as a robin.

Luckily, the day before I left Victoria, I met a charming lady who told me that the humming-bird detests roses, and that its favourite flowers are honey-flowers, such as the fuchsia and the honeysuckle. As the honeysuckle was in bloom in the gardens of the hotel, I resolved to be up early the next morning and sit in a deck-chair under the honeysuckle and see whether the British Columbia humming-bird was or was not a myth.

A friend who suffers from morning insomnia promised to ring me up when he woke, and at a quarter to six the telephone at my bedside buzzed, and, leaping out of bed I hauled on my trousers and coat over my pyjamas. The problem then was how to get out of the hotel. No one who has not tried knows how difficult it is to find one's way from an upper story in a large hotel to the ground floor at an hour at which the lifts are not working. In the end, after losing our way again and again, we had to steal out into the gardens by the fire-escape.

It had rained during the night, and it was impossible to sit down in the deck-chairs under

the honeysuckle. Consequently, we were compelled to walk up and down in the exquisitely clear and sunny morning air. After ten minutes of perambulating, one of us said: 'I hear a spinning noise like a grasshopper.' After fifteen minutes, another of us said: 'I saw something flash by.' After twenty minutes, she said: 'There it is,' I could see nothing. 'On that delphinium,' she said.

By the time we reached the delphinium there was nothing there. 'Wait,' she said, 'it will come back.' We stood in the doorway of a hothouse within three feet of the delphinium, and suddenly, as if it had been created and put there by a miracle, a little bird with its throat on fire was stationed in the air, with its long beak in one of the cerulean flowers. It hovered there, its wings beating so fast that they were almost invisible, and then with a sound like a tiny kiss it flew a few inches backwards—it is, I believe, the only bird that can fly backwards—and darted to drink at another of the delphinium's Cambridge-blue flowers.

If you look at a picture of a rufous hummingbird you will see that the patch of red on its throat is comparatively small, and that the bird is mainly green and brown. But if you see it

three feet away in the early morning sunshine the bird seems a blazing jewel. I have seen no colour so radiant except in a kingfisher in flight. It is as though the humming - bird's



GARDENERS AND AN EARLY GUEST OR TWO APPEARED

breast were alight, so dazzling, so iridescent it is. Something of the kingfisher and something of the dragon-fly and with ten times the dragon-fly's speed—that will give you some conception of the beauty of the humming-bird.

I could have stood all the morning watching it suspended in the air at one flower after another, backing an inch or two and darting to another flower, and giving a little parting kiss to each flower that had yielded up its honey. But suddenly, as if at the waving of a wand, the bird vanished, its flight so thunderbolt fast that the eye could not follow it. Then gardeners appeared, and then an early guest or two, and we moved into the hotel, satisfied that it was worth travelling all the way from London to Quebec and from Quebec to Vancouver Island if only to have seen so much of the loveliness of the world concentrated in one tiny creature measuring three and a quarter inches from tip of beak to tip of tail.

I was talking to a Canadian country boy afterwards, and he said: 'I 'm scared of humming-birds. They fly so fast, that, if one of them flew against your forehead, its beak would go right into your brain and kill you. Oh,' he said, 'I don't like humming-birds.'

Well, I am easily scared, but I am prepared at any time of day to face a humming-bird. Even at six o'clock in the morning. And, heaven knows, there are not in this wide world half a dozen things, safe or dangerous, that I would care to face at six o'clock in the morning. Not the Pacific. Not Mr R. B. Bennett. But a humming-bird is another matter. To see that jewel poised in the sunlight of early morning I would rise, bold as a lion, at half-past five.



XXV. GENIUS

AN advertisement appeared the other day: 'Epic novel, 140,000 words, seeks publisher or patron.—"Genius" . . . N.W.I.' Approached by the *News Chronicle* for information about himself, the novelist declared: 'I 'm sure I 'm a genius. In fact, I 've just registered my telegraphic address as "Genius, London." ' He added that his novel had been sent to sixty-nine publishers, all of whom rejected it except one, who went bankrupt just as he was about to publish it. This steady flow of misfortune has

not in the slightest degree modified the novelist's opinion of his work. 'It is really a big thing,' he declared. 'I say definitely that it compares with Thomas Hardy.'

I have not read his book, and so I cannot say whether the novelist is a genius or not. But, as I read his advertisement, I could not help envying him his magnificent confidence in his powers. Even if a writer is neglected by the public—or rather by the publishers, who prevent his work from reaching the public—it must be some consolation for him to feel that he has only to bide his time, like Shelley and Keats, in order to be ushered into a place among the immortals. In the day-dreams of youth it seems a far more desirable fate to be a neglected genius than to be a successful pot-boiler. Genius in a garret—how the heart goes out to it! If Oliver Goldsmith had been as successful from the beginning as the American 'columnist' who died the other day leaving a large fortune, he would never have become posterity's darling. It is difficult to love an enormously successful man unless you know him well enough to be able to see him apart from his success. So deep-seated is the antipathy to success that many a writer has lost the reputa-

tion of being a genius merely by becoming popular. In my youth I mixed a good deal with art-students, and I found that success was as much under suspicion in the world of painting as in the world of letters. A rich R.A. was then a sickening spectacle to the idealistic young. 'Simply a foul old pot-boiler,' was the nearest thing to a kind word it was possible to say about him.

Worldly failure at that time seemed a very attractive fate for a genius. And most of my friends, I am sure, abjured in their hearts the financial rewards that nobody had yet offered them. Genius was the only thing they worshipped, and for that—until they fell in love—they would have bartered all their hopes of riches. Oddly enough, the only one among them who was quite sure he was a genius was the least so of all. Confidence in the possession of genius is a characteristic shared equally by men of genius and men of none. Horace boasted that in his verse he had built a monument more lasting than bronze, and he was justified. But other poets, I fancy, have been as boastful and their works have perished. Shakespeare was justly confident of the immortality of his sonnets, but how many other poets

have proclaimed their own greatness whose books are now dust! The friend of whom I have spoken was as certain that he would, in his favourite phrase, 'make a noise in the world' as he was that the next day's sun would rise. He had a passion for writing verse, and was constantly producing long poems that read like cantos that Spenser had thrown into the waste-paper basket. He had an extraordinary facility for rhyme and for imitation, and when he had filled an exercise-book with his rhymes and imitations, he knew that it was all good. One day he gave me a long poem with the request that I should read it and give him my opinion of it when next I saw him. 'I don't expect you ever to do anything original yourself,' he said to me, flatteringly, 'but I do respect your judgment as a critic.' I took the poem home and saw at once that it was merely the product of long immersion in *Don Juan*. I told him so as tactfully as I could at our next meeting—said that the rhymes were very ingenious and that the poem was Byronic. 'You mean,' he said, his face stiffening with incredulity, 'that I'm a mere rhymester?' He was a little man who rose on the extreme points of his toes at each step as if to add to his inches, and he

seemed to elongate himself by at least a foot as he strode beside me in cold indignation. I did my best *to mingle truth with honey*, but it was no use. When he met another friend of mine a day later, he said to him: 'My God, do you know who Y. compared me to? Byron!' And he shrieked with mirthless laughter at the supreme idiocy of my belittlement.

There are, I fancy, a considerable number of poets in the civilized parts of the world to-day who are equally certain of their possession of the divine spark. The pleasure of writing verse is so great that the poet finds it difficult to understand why his work should not be as pleasant to read as it was to write. His raptures about the moon and the sea were so real that he feels that any one who is not utterly indifferent to the moon and the sea must be enchanted by his verses. And the worse the verse is, the more eagerly he desires praise for it. If the praise is withheld he asks, woefully: 'But what 's wrong with it?' And the only truthful answer, as a rule, is: 'There is nothing wrong with it except that you expect other people to read it and enjoy it.' To be asked to criticize an ordinary poem is like being asked to criticize an ordinary landscape painting by an

amateur. What one is chiefly conscious of is that the thing has been infinitely better done by thousands of other people already. This does not mean that the poem was not worth writing or the landscape not worth painting, but only that they are not worth showing to anybody outside the family circle. I am sure that it gives almost as much pleasure to write mediocre verse as to write verse like Shakespeare's, and to paint a mediocre landscape as to paint like Constable. The main difference between the genius and the non-genius is that only the genius can communicate his pleasure. It is, perhaps, fortunate that genius is rare, for life is short, and if all poems and pictures were works of genius we should have no time to enjoy them. As it is, not more than one poem in a hundred thousand and not more than one picture in ten thousand is better than goodish. This is a merciful dispensation of providence.

Since the introduction of compulsory education, I imagine, the number of poets has greatly increased. Everybody has learned (more or less) how to write and everybody has learned (more or less) how to think, and the result has been some deplorably mediocre writing and some deplorably mediocre thinking. Neither of

these things, however, is entirely an evil. Each of them ministers to human vanity—that grand source of happiness when it is not a source of humiliation and distress. One of the happiest men I ever knew was a mediocre poet. He was a charming, refined old clergyman whom I always thought of as a reincarnated John of Gaunt. He used to talk to me about poetry, and always led the talk round somehow to his own verse. 'When I published my book,' he said, 'people compared me to Alexander Smith; and you won't remember, but, when the Laureateship was vacant, many people thought that it should have been offered to Alexander Smith instead of Tennyson.' He brought all this out with the most exquisite simplicity, and I assure you it was no small pleasure to be in the company of an old man who enjoyed life doubly as he saw himself as the peer of Tennyson. There are few things lovelier than harmless vanity. How it makes the face shine, and brings a sweet tremulousness into human speech!

I knew another clergyman, tiny and side-whiskered, who was equally assured of his gifts as a poet. One day, I was praising the work of William Watson, whom he had never read. 'Show me one of his books,' he said. 'I have

only one test for poetry. When I read a poem, I ask myself: "Could I have done it better myself?" If I feel I could have done it better myself, I say to myself: "No, it 's no use. Whatever other people may say, that poem wasn't worth writing.'" I gave him the *Odes*, and he read through the *Ode to a Skylark*. He shook his head as he laid the book down. 'No,' he said, 'no good. I could have done it better myself.' And, in spite of the damning evidence contained in his own verse—addresses to Queen Victoria, and so forth—he believed this. And he was happy in the belief.

It is true that both these clergymen had incomes not derived from their verse. To be happy as a neglected genius, I imagine, it is almost necessary to have a safe income. I think myself that everybody who claims to be a genius ought to be subsidized by the State, which, even if it did not publish him, should at least feed him. This, I am sure, would greatly increase the sum of human happiness. It might also increase the sum of human laziness and result in far fewer books being written. And are not both these desirable ends?

XXVI. THE FIRST FLY

As I lay in bed on Tuesday morning, smoking my first after-breakfast cigarette, the first fly of spring alighted on the newspaper I was reading. I write this in no spirit of boastfulness. I am not like those people who write to the papers under the proud illusion that they have seen a wheatear or heard a cuckoo a week or a month earlier than anybody else. I am prepared to believe that flies have been seen going about their business here and there in England since the beginning of January. At the same time, this was the first fly that had brought the message of a reawakened world into my own bedroom. And what struck me as odd was the fact that I did not welcome it.

I can think of scarcely anything else in nature—anything that, like the first fly, is a symbol of revival—towards which I am conscious of antipathy. I look eagerly for the first snow-drop, the first crocus, the first almond-blossom. And, lest you may think this is due to an aesthetic impulse, I may say that I feel the day

has been enriched on which I see the first dog's-mercury—no beauty among the plants. I am no lover of bees in a room, but the first bee of the year that comes in and makes a prisoner of



THE FIRST FLY OF SPRING

himself behind the glass of my window-panes is treated as an honoured guest till I have got him out again. Even the midge performing its mazy dances seems for a day or two after its first appearance a creature with a right to a

place in the sun. I have not yet seen the first wasp or the first bat, but, in regard to them, too, I feel that this Noah's Ark of a world would be a poorer place without them. Spring flowers, spring birds, spring beasts, spring insects—my heart goes out to the whole family of them except the busy, curious, thirsty fly.

It might be thought that the universal antipathy to the fly is the result of our improved knowledge of hygiene. ; But hatred of flies existed long before hygiene had been thought of. Beelzebub the god of flies was not an invention of the Ministry of Health. Nor can our hatred of flies be said to be instinctive. The child observing the fly on the windowsill, as it washes its forelegs, washes its hindlegs, and washes its face, is filled with friendly curiosity rather than dislike. What could be prettier than the rainbow lights on a fly's wings? And who could be hostile to a creature clever enough to walk upside down on a ceiling? What child, again, except an infant scientist or an infant sadist, can see a fly slowly mummified in a spider's web without feeling a pang of sympathy? 'Will you walk into my parlour?' said the spider to the fly'—nine out of ten children profoundly hope that the fly will not

be such a fool as to accept the invitation. The proverbial description of a truly good and gentle man as one who 'would not hurt a fly' shows that others besides Sterne have been conscious of no innate loathing for *Musca domestica*.

And yet—and yet, for some reason or other, we have never had a Society for the Protection of Flies. All over the world at the present time we have movements to preserve the most ferocious of wild beasts—the lion, the tiger, the leopard, and the buffalo—and the most noxious of pests like the fox, and I should not be surprised to hear that some honest soul was putting up a fight for the preservation of cobras and boa-constrictors; but even in a world that is reeking with humanitarianism where it is not reeking with bloodlust, the fly has not a single friend. Has the Society for the Prohibition of Blood Sports ever raised its voice in condemnation of that inhuman slogan: 'Swat that fly'? Mr Peter Fleming in the kindness of his heart has assured us that alligators are not dangerous, but I do not think that even he has tried to restrain our murderous passions by boldly proclaiming that flies are not dangerous. As a matter of fact, any one who stood up for the house-fly in 1937 would run the risk of being

regarded as a semi-lunatic scarcely less crazy than a man who maintained that the earth was flat. And so, without a solitary protest, these trustful little visitors to our homes are annually massacred in millions by methods bearing a close resemblance to poison-gas warfare.

This state of affairs would not, I think, be possible except for the fact that flies, with all their admirable qualities of trustfulness, friendliness, and more than bulldog courage, have made themselves such a confounded nuisance. Many tender-hearted people could forgive the fly as a disease-carrier, but, even if one were as saintly as St Francis, one would be hard put to it to forgive a creature that returns to perch on one's temple, bald crown, or nose, even though it has been warned and driven away fifty times in five minutes. One is not afraid of a fly as one is afraid of a wasp or a bee, but, as it returns to one's face with its pertinacious buzzings, one is exasperated by it as by the supreme bore in nature. *J* That is what the child discovers before it is many years old. When it wakes on a summer morning, it finds that a fly is performing low-flying exercises backwards and forwards across its face, equally irritating whether the fly alights or whether it decides

at the last minute to zoom off round the room once more before attempting a landing. And, in the evening, when the child is trying to sleep in the late daylight, the persistent approach



MURDER! MURDER!

of the fly to the face, always threatening to tickle even when it retreats without actually tickling, is still more maddening. I remember bringing the whole household to my nursery with loud shouts of 'Murder! Murder!'

because I was being tormented beyond human endurance by a fly That would not let me sleep, The shouts, I think, were justified. I was—literally, shall we say?—being bored to death.

It may be that the fly, in buzzing round our faces, is only trying to do what the cat does when -he comes purring and rubbing himself against our legs—to flatter us with its favours and to win our good graces. It certainly possesses many of the same qualities as the cat—unteachableness, disobedience, and inopportune noisiness. I sometimes wonder whether, if cats did not sleep so much of the time away, we should not find them as intolerable as flies. If cats were awake from morning till night and capable of coming in through the window in numbers at any moment and creating an incessant din, not many of us would preserve our admiration of them. **Even** as it is, we resent the intrusion of other people's cats into our houses. . It is—with few exceptions—our own cats alone that we wish to see there. And the best cat in the world would become an irritant if there were not long periods during which he ceases to demand our attention with voice and claw and is content to become a thing of beauty sleeping before the fire. It is the fly's

wakefulness that is its capital crime. It is chiefly because of this, I am sure, that the friendly little disease-carrier has won the enmity of the civilized world.

The human antipathy to flies, it should be remembered, is not shared by the whole animal creation. Just as the Englishman loves birds or beasts that he can hunt and eat, so the sparrow rejoices in the fly as a provider of food and sport. Even the cat looks on the fly as a game insect and pursues it like a sportsman. The spider would undoubtedly regret the disappearance of the fly from the scheme of things, so that it cannot be said that, even under Mr Shaw's scheme of liquidation, the fly would deserve to be liquidated on the ground that it performed no useful service to society. In its Own small way it is as useful as the partridge and much more useful than the fox.

And what an interesting little creature it is, if only we could bring ourselves to approach it scientifically! One might profitably spend a large part of one's lifetime in studying the various kinds of house-flies and learning to distinguish between the note, flight, and conformation of one and the note, flight, and conformation of another. How few Englishmen there are

who could tell at sight the bluebottle known as *Calliphora erythrocephala* from the other bluebottle known as *Phormia terraenovae*, or either of them from the third species, *Lucilia caesar* ? Then there are the stable-fly and the cluster-fly, and, besides the common house-fly, there are the smaller house-fly and the black window-fly, *Scenopinus fenestralis*.

For my own part, unfortunately, I lack the scientific bent. When a fly approaches my breakfast-tray I do not care what its Latin name is. My only feeling is that spring and the world would be better without it. I should not like to kill it, but I wish it had never been born or that somebody else had killed it. A humanitarian obviously could not go further than that.

XXVII. A FAILURE? OF COURSE IT IS

'Is education a failure?' asked Miss Agnes B. Muir, in her presidential address to the annual congress of the Educational Institute of Scotland. To this question the timid and half-hearted may be tempted to answer: 'Yes and no.' Those who, like myself, prefer bolder methods will reply without hesitation: 'Of course it is.'

No one has betrayed man's hopes to anything like the same extent as the schoolmaster. No one, that is, except the clergyman, the doctor, the statesman, the merchant, the manufacturer, the working-man, the psychologist, the free-thinker, the inventor, and a number of other people whose names cannot be given since they would fill a book.

We who may be described as ordinary human beings expected too much of all these people. Many of them we endowed with magic qualities, expecting them to save us without any effort of our own. We thought, for example, that if we trained hundreds of thousands of

young men to be doctors, we should be able to eat what we liked, drink what we liked, and live as we liked, and that, when Nature began to exact her price for our follies, we could then be renovated and restored to the vigour of our youth by a magic potion from a bottle. After wasting millions of pounds on medical schools, unfortunately, we find that Harley Street can help only those who help themselves. It can do a lot for us ; it can change the fashionable disease from one year to another; but it cannot promise perpetual good digestion to those who defy the laws of digestion. Therefore, I conclude that medicine is a failure. The doctors have let us down.

. There is nothing more evident in the history of the past or in the world about us than the universal fact of failure. Nothing that man has ever put his hand to has succeeded. All his inventions end in imperfection like that of a broken Greek statue. I do not deny that he has invented and almost perfected many marvellous machines; but all his machines, from the printing-press to the aeroplane, have disappointed the great hopes that have gathered round them. The printing-press—was it not to spread truth and understanding among all

classes and all peoples? Mighty was truth, and truth, we believed, would prevail, if only it could get printed. We did not realize that an enormous amount of printing could be done and yet very little truth be allowed to appear on paper—that the printing-press could be widely used to spread, not the truth, but ignorance of the truth. Reading, it was thought, would enable men to think for themselves. It has turned out to be a means of preventing men from thinking for themselves. Many an honest European country must be cursing the memory of Caxton or Fust or whoever it was that first taught men how to print.

I am not a pessimist, but the history of inventions almost makes me one. Think of all the great expectations that were roused in generous breasts by the invention of quick methods of transport. (Men were to be brought closer together; the world was to become one place with the help of the railway, the steamboat, and the flying ship. Shelley foresaw the salvation of the world as a result of the invention of the balloon. Yet all these inventions have resulted not so much in enabling men to get nearer each other as in enabling men to get at each other. Hopes that things would be

otherwise were baseless. Or rather they were based on the fallacy that proximity is inevitably a cause of liking. Experience proves, of course, that proximity is a cause both of love and of hate. 'The more we get together, the merrier we 'll be,' sang the Frothblowers. It would be equally true, if less poetic, to say: The more we get together, the more we want to get at each other's throats.'

In view of the failure of inventions to save mankind, it is odd now and then to hear a man of science attacking Christianity as though it were the outstanding failure of history. 'Christianity is undoubtedly a failure. How could it be anything else when once it fell into the hands of human beings? Human beings, those supreme devisers of failure, can be guaranteed to make a failure of any gift. There are those who say: 'Christianity has not failed; it has never been tried.' But that is a mere quibble. It has failed in the same sense in which everything else has failed, from the printing-press to the aeroplane. In other words, it has been used for all sorts of purposes that had very little to do with its highest purpose. In other words, the human race has failed—as usual.

It is all the more to the credit of the human

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race, it seems to me, that, in spite of its long record of almost uninterrupted failure, it goes hopefully on, believing that it has discovered the secret of success at last. Take the failure of education, for example. Once it was felt that one of the chief purposes of education was the building up of the mind and character through discipline. Latin declensions and algebra might seem fairly useless as a means of preparing the young for what on speech-days was called the battle of life, but at least they were supposed to have great disciplinary value. The youth whom they disciplined, unhappily, turned out to be very ordinary decent incompetent sinful human beings. Education, therefore, had failed, and it had failed presumably because it was bent upon disciplining the spirits of the young. From this it was only a step to the conclusion that the young should be released from discipline and (allowed to stay away from classes, to use language once prohibited, to address their teachers as equals—not, as was so often the case in the Victorian school, as inferiors placed over them by a cruel destiny. Hence, a great new experiment has broken upon the world, full of radiant hope. Many quite intelligent people are sincerely convinced that

now, after centuries of the failure of education, a new kind of education has been discovered that will not fail. I do not share these convictions. It seems to me that human beings have such a genius for failure that they can make a failure of anything.

That is why I find it difficult to bubble with enthusiasm over many of the modern experiments to redeem the world from the failures of the past. Consider, for example, the experiment in sexual freedom that is now advocated on many sides. Sex repression was tried for a good many centuries ; it failed ; it did not produce a race of perfect men and women. The inference drawn from this was that the world could be saved, or at least greatly improved, by what may be called, for want of a better phrase, sexual liberty. (There is, of course, no such thing.) So far as I can see, however, there is no evidence that human beings will be happier under the new code than under the old. Egotism will always make men miserable, and it is as easy to be an egotist in 1937 as it was in 1887. \It is on our egotism that all the experiments For perfection are ultimately broken. The truth is, everything is a failure and will always be a failure till

we do something about it—what, I do not know.

Not that I wish to cast a shadow of pessimism over the new age. As a matter of fact, there are worse things than living in a world foredoomed to failure. There are so many incidental successes that seem all the brighter by contrast. We realize this when we consider cookery, which has certainly been a titanic failure over the greater part of the earth's surface. Cookery has failed to give us health; it has failed to give pleasure to our palates. What a recompense of delight do we obtain, however, when we taste a perfect salmon fresh from the river, or a perfectly cooked grouse? If cookery were always perfect, should we not ultimately cease to enjoy eating? Fortunately, we live in a world in which it is possible to rejoice over a potato perfectly boiled, over a cup of coffee perfectly made, as the woman in the parable rejoiced over the recovery of her sixpence. There is no end to the pleasures of living surrounded by imperfect things. How lucky for us it is even that poetry is on the whole a failure! If all the poetry that is written were good, we should have no time to read it. Even if all Wordsworth were good, we should

scarcely have time to read him. How much better the *Ode* and *The Highland Reaper* seem for their setting of maundering! (We should congratulate ourselves, it seems to me, on the fact that Shakespeare himself, like Christianity, education, and marriage, is a failure.

As for education, I admire its struggles towards perfection, and I realize that it must go on struggling, but I see no likelihood of its achieving it. I enjoyed life at my own school, and I enjoyed it in the classes in which I was badly taught as much almost as in the classes in which I was well taught. The chief function of a school, to my mind, is to be a boys' club, and, if it is a good boys' club, or rather a good club for boys, it does not matter very much whether, from an Olympian point of view, education is a failure or not. After all, everything is a failure, from statesmanship to motor driving, and we may as well get used to the fact in our teens.

XXVIII. LOW JINKS OR A JOKE 'S A JOKE

A BOOK of jokes was recently sent to me by a stranger, with the suggestion that I might like to write about it. It was a book that I had occasionally dipped into as a boy—*The Jest Book*, a collection made by Mark Lemon, one of the first editors of *Punch*. I do not know whether it is still in circulation; probably it is as it is a volume in the;Golden Treasury Series. To any of the rising generation who read it, however, I fear it must appear a very mortuary of jokes. Possibly it seemed so to many readers even in 1865 when it was first published. It is difficult to believe, for example, that thousands of people once split their sides laughing over the quip entitled *The Ready Reckoner*, which runs: 'A mathematician being asked by a wag: "If a pig weighs 200 pounds, how much will a great boar (*bore* ?) weigh?" he replied, "Jump into the scales and I will *tell you immediately*." ' Even with the help of italics—indispensable apparently in old-fashioned jest-books—it is difficult to laugh except at the fact that so

crude a witticism was once supposed to be worth a laugh.

Almost any jest that involved an insult seems to have been thought to deserve recording in those days, especially if the insult referred to somebody's personal appearance. I myself rather like insults to the personal appearance, if the personal appearance is not my own. In my infancy I always enjoyed hearing one small boy saying to another: 'You must have been behind the door when faces were given out.' The only two serious fights in which I was ever engaged—and, being engaged, was beaten—were the result of my having with nascent humour called one boy 'Rose-bud' and another boy 'Yellow-faced Duck.' I should have been surprised at the time, however, to learn that insults scarcely less original were being recorded in print for the entertainment of posterity. For example: 'A very plain actor being addressed on the stage, "My lord, you *change* countenance," a young fellow in the pit said, "For heaven's sake, *let* him !"' Had I been in the theatre on the occasion, I have no doubt that I should have laughed at this, for interruptions and sudden sallies in public places easily surprise us into laughter. Consider how we enjoy

the give-and-take of insults at a street-corner meeting. The interrupter who bawls at the speaker: 'Does your mother know you 're out?' gets the reception of a humorist, and, if the speaker replies fiercely: 'Go and boil your head,' the thrust of his wit delights us like a retort of Whistler's. Try, however, to record the scene in print as a humorous anecdote, and how the magic evaporates! 'A certain soap-box orator being interrupted by a listener who asked him "Does your mother know you 're out?" replied on the instant, "Go and *boil your head.*" ' The salt has certainly lost its savour.

There are poor enough jokes that go on being amusing in print, largely because they are attributed to some famous man whose name puts us in the mood for being amused. Those who like Charles Lamb, for example, will meet any joke of his half-way. Some of his jokes were good, and some were only middling; but even the middling ones seem twice as good as they would have seemed if they had been anonymous. I like, for example, his joke about the card-player with dirty hands. 'Charles Lamb said once to a brother whist-player, who was a hand more clever than clean, and who had enough in him to afford the joke, " M . , if *dirt*

were trumps, what *hands* you would hold!" That, being Charles Lamb's, seems to me pretty funny but, though the pun is neat enough, I wonder whether it would seem so good in an anecdote about an unnamed stockbroker? Douglas Jerrold's, again, was a name that once hall-marked any joke, however obvious, that was attributed to him. I do not think that Mark Lemon would have thought it worth while to include the joke called 'Caliban's Looking-glass' if it had not had Jerrold's reputation as a wit to support it: A remarkably ugly and disagreeable man sat opposite Jerrold at a dinner-party. Before the cloth was removed Jerrold accidentally broke a glass. Whereupon the ugly gentleman, thinking to twit his neighbour with great effect, said slyly: "What, already, Jerrold? Now I never break a glass." "I wonder at that," was Jerrold's instant reply, "you ought whenever you *look in one*." ' That retort, most people will agree, is not above the reach of a not very clever undergraduate. If it were made at Oxford to-day, I cannot believe that the editor of the *Isis* would insist on having it for his next number. As I read it, indeed, I could not help wondering whether wits ever really talked

like that. I have never heard of Mr Shaw or Mr Max Beerbohm's suggesting jocularly to a fellow-guest at a dinner-party that his face was so ugly that it would smash a mirror if he



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looked into it. Fashions change, however, and wit that once graced the dinner-tables of the intellectual is now relegated to the preparatory school. How fortunate we are not to possess a verbatim record of the wit with which men of genius regaled each other in the

Mermaid Tavern! Heaven knows what jokes on the mirror-smashing level may have seemed funny there at the time. Most jokes made in company have a life like that of the soap-bubble. ' The bubble vanishes, and can no more be reconstructed than Humpty-Dumpty.

Every one who has been present at a party of wits and, having come away feeling that he has enjoyed one of the great nights of his life, has tried to report the wonders of the evening to his friends, knows how all but impossible this is. He may recall a brilliant epigram, a good story, but, even though he may have a perfect memory, how colourless now seems much that at the time seemed iridescent! Wit owes much to the scene, much to the personality of the speaker; there is not one joke in twenty made, even by the wittiest of men, that retains its full measure of wit in a new setting and in the report of another speaker. No one who dined with Oscar Wilde in his most brilliant hours ever brought away with him a report of Wilde's sayings that made them sound half as brilliant as they sounded at table. There was a time when Foote had only to open his lips to set everybody laughing: to-day, most of his recorded jests seem as flat as champagne

poured out yesterday. 'Foote,' we are told, 'praising the hospitality of the Irish, after one of his trips to the sister kingdom, a gentleman asked him whether he had ever been to *Cork*. "No, sir," replied Foote; "but I have seen many *drawings* of it." ' I have no doubt that most of us, if we had been present when Foote said this, would have laughed heartily with the rest of the company, and on our way home would have congratulated ourselves on having had a sparkling evening. But, after the lapse of years, the pun is no more amusing than the puns we find in the conundrums in Christmas crackers. Not that I am indifferent to the puns in Christmas crackers. But they do not bear repetition. They are valid only for Christmas Day.

The Jest Book, I am afraid, bears melancholy witness to the high rate of mortality among jokes. It contains 1,711 jokes, and I doubt whether more than eleven of these would make an ordinary reader laugh aloud. As one wanders about among the jokes, one has a queer 'banquet-hall-deserted' feeling. Only very occasionally do one's spirits shake off the depression. My spirits did so, for example, on reading this. 'A glorious bull is related, in the life of Dr

Sims, of a countryman of his, an Irishman, for whom he had prescribed an emetic, who said with great *naïveté* "My dear doctor, it is of no use your giving me an emetic ! I tried it twice in Dublin, and it would *not stay* in my stomach either time." ' Is that a really good joke, or did it seem so to me only in comparison with the worse jokes that surround it? It may be that I am easily amused by jokes of the Wise-Men-of-Gotham type and jokes that reveal an exquisite logic of misunderstanding. I certainly like the joke entitled 'Paddy's Logic,' though I read a neater version of it somewhere else the other day. 'The sun is all very well,' said an Irishman, 'but the moon is worth two of it; for the moon affords us light in the night-time, when we *want it*, whereas the sun's with us in the daytime, when we have *no occasion for it*.' That aphorism seems to me to be rich in the poetry of false logic.

For the rest, too many of the jokes are on this level: 'Dr Spurzheim was lecturing on phrenology. "What is to be conceived the bump of drunkenness?" said the professor. "The barrel-organ," interrupted an auditor.' At such simple jests did the world once laugh. At jokes no better it still laughs in the music-

halls and in the musical-comedy theatres. If the wittiest man alive were to compile a *New Jest Book* containing all the best jokes at which Englishmen have laughed during the last twenty years, it might seem to the reader, as Mark Lemon's does, like a garden littered with exploded fireworks on the morning of the sixth of November. The life of an ordinary joke is a short and a merry one. How many immortal jokes would the perfect Jest Book contain? Probably, not above a hundred.



XXIX. MYSELF A MENACE

JEROME K. JEROME in *Three Men in a Boat* warned us against the peril of reading about diseases and their symptoms. The cunningly phrased advertisement of a patent medicine may easily send an imaginative reader hunting through his body for symptoms of an unsuspected illness and may even persuade him that they exist. To live among medical students and to read their text-books is to suffer, while in the best of health, imaginary onsets of appendicitis, hip-joint disease, and half the other afflictions known to the doctors. There are people who are immune from the suggestions even of patent medicine advertisements, but they must be in a minority, or the medicines would not flourish. I am not myself so susceptible to the charms of advertisement as I used to be. As

one grows older, I imagine, one gradually abandons both the fears and the hopes that the advertisements once roused. (Or it may be nearer the truth to say that, while the fears persist, the hopes dwindle. I fancy, however, that in youth the nervous human being is more keenly imaginative and conjures up nightmares of illness on a more lavish scale than in later life. The coward, it is said, dies a thousand deaths* in youth he also suffers from a thousand diseases. By middle age these have been reduced to eight hundred and fifty.

I, myself, have always been nervous. I am one who in childhood ought to have been dragged hurriedly by my nurse past chemists' shops and warned never to read the wrapper of a patent-medicine bottle. In youth I ought to have been shielded from the company of medical students or, at least, forbidden to question them about obscure pains in the throat, chest, and joints. As it was, unfortunately, I knew the names of most diseases in my teens and decided that I had at least half of them. I was a godsend to the medical students whom I knew. They practised on me with their stethoscopes; they tapped my chest; they tapped my knee-joints; they twisted my leg up and down in the hope of discovering appendicitis. In the end, as a rule, they played

for safety, and decided that I needed iron, and made out a prescription. I swallowed their bottles, and they always did me good till fresh symptoms appeared.

In the course of time, my imagination has become less romantic, though I still swallow pellets of various kinds faithfully enough. I think I have reached a stage at which I could read the description of the symptoms of a disease without being positive that I was suffering from it. I thought so, at least, till the other day when I picked up a book by an eminent doctor which disturbed my complacency. He did not alarm me about the health of my body, but he perturbed me considerably about the health of my mind. You who possess *mens sana in corpore sano*, and who have never felt nervous even when you have turned up at a dinner-party with the wrong tie, could probably read the book without a tremor. I, however, who am nervous even when a youth in a cloth cap sitting opposite to me in a bus brings out an old-fashioned razor and draws the blade across his palm in order to display its beauty to a friend- felt a queer tremor passing through my being when I came on the sentence: 'I maintain . . . that a mild degree of nervousness is much more tragic in effect than

cancer, that despondency is much more deplorable than galloping consumption, and that chronic mental tiredness is much more pitiable than true insanity.' 'Nervousness, despondency, and lassitude,' continued the eminent doctor, 'are the most tragic illnesses. . . . They spoil more lives, wreck more homes, and create more poverty than grave disorders. They give rise to something worse than recognized disease and death.' You will understand the alarm I felt as I read this when I tell you that these three illnesses—nervousness, despondency, and lassitude—are illnesses from which I have suffered all my life.

I do not wish to paint too dark a picture of myself, however. I may be nervous, but I am not afraid of spiders, beetles, or mice. It always comforts me, when I accuse myself of cowardice, to remember the many occasions on which women and children have called on me as the one hero in the house to eject a spider from the bathroom. Similarly, I have more than once been in a house in which no one but myself had the courage—it is the only word for it—to descend to the basement at midnight in quest of food, partly because of the beetles and partly because of the sinister ticking of the gas-meter. I must say for myself that I can go down among

a floorful of beetles with the resolution and coolness of Julius Caesar. In presence of most other things I am nervous, however—mobs, dogs, scenes with waiters, mad-looking people jumping at the last moment into a railway compartment in which I am sitting alone, shellfish at Boulogne, Fascists, Communists, fire at sea, fire on land, lions that have escaped from menageries, life, the future, the present—almost everything, in fact, except spiders, beetles, mice, and meters ticking in the basement.

Being so constituted, I naturally felt far from happy when I learned from the doctor's book that I was a danger to society, a wrecker of homes, something rather worse than the germ of a fatal disease. And in order to convince me that I am the person about whom he is writing—the victim of nervousness and 'unrecognized fear'—the doctor goes on to describe my symptoms. 'The person simply cannot settle comfortably and be at ease,' he says. 'He must be continually doing something, either lighting cigarettes, changing his position, or moving papers, books, or ornaments. If he is waiting for the train he walks the platform.' I will say in my defence that if while waiting for the train I walk the platform, this is due to the grossly

inadequate provision of seats by the railway companies. On the whole, however, his indictment holds, I am continually lighting cigarettes, and, since I always slide down on to the small of my back in an arm-chair, I am continually changing my position. Sometimes, though not often, I even move books. In other words, I am what the doctor calls a 'worrier.' Nervous apprehension, he declares, 'makes a man worry immensely over trifles, which he readily admits to be foolish. He worries in case he may be late for some appointment.' That, undoubtedly, is me—or, if you will have it so, I—to the life. I worry even about keeping an editor waiting for an article.

The second disease of the age, according to the doctor, is depression. Here, too, in his description of the victim, the doctor has drawn my portrait. 'The sufferer,' he says, 'looks at life through darkened spectacles. He is pessimistic, low-spirited and without much hope. He finds normal work a labour and derives no pleasure from recreation. His mood is serious and somewhat sullen. He tends to criticize destructively constructive schemes and damps the ardour of the enthusiast.' How faithful a picture! Pessimistic and without much hope—

I have undoubtedly been feeling like that lately. 'Finds normal work a labour'—why, I have felt like that since I first went to school at the age of five. 'Tends to criticize destructively constructive schemes and damps the ardour of the enthusiast'—you should hear me talking to a young Communist, but, alas! I never yet have been able to damp his or her ardour.

From this we come to the 'third predominating nervous illness,' which is lethargy. You who do not suffer from this may have little sympathy for those of us who do, but it seems to me that we deserve it. 'The patient is,' the doctor tells us, 'asthenic. The slightest mental effort generates fatigue and boredom.' I should say rather that it generates antipathy. It is the thought of work, rather than work itself, that disgusts the lethargic man. Work itself is pleasant enough when you have settled down to it, but how hateful is the necessity of settling down! The doctor, however, describes admirably the physical symptoms of the lethargic man. 'Moderate exercise,' he says, 'produces aching in the limbs and excessive tiredness.' How often has the truth of this been brought home to me during a holiday after the first day's divot-replacing on the golf course!

What, then, is to be done with us—the nervous, depressed, and lethargic members of society? We are more dangerous, apparently, than the mentally unfit and the 'classical defective.' Even so, the doctor hesitates to propose drastic remedies. 'The classical defective,' he declares, 'is not the cardinal danger. The seeds of mental deficiency are sown more numerous by the apparently normal members of the tainted family, and to press for sterilization here would immediately arouse indignation, resistance, and rebellion.' The last clause of the sentence is, I believe, true. One can imagine the indignation of the nervous, the resistance of the depressed, and the rebellion even of the lethargic. I am glad that the doctor realizes this. But, in point of fact, his book is full of good sense. I only wish that he had not convinced me that I have so many of the symptoms of diseases that make me a menace to society.

XXX. G. K. C.

IF you consult *Who's Who*, you will find that the first book of G. K. Chesterton's verse mentioned is called *The Wild Knight*, and that the first book of his prose is called *The Defendant*. The titles were prophetic. Chesterton was to go through life perpetually playing the part of the defendant in the spirit of the wild knight. He would have agreed with those military authorities who hold that the best form of defence is offence, and he ranged the landscape daily for enemies against whom he could defend himself—or, at least, against whom he could defend the causes in which he believed. He had an enormous appetite for fighting, and if he had been an Irish peasant living in the days of faction fights, his great bulk would have been conspicuous at every neighbouring fair, his cudgel twirled above his head, and his eyes alight with the joy of battle. He was a fighter of an unusual kind, however. He could hate and yet remain magnanimous in his hatred. He could fight with all the ferocity of sincerity,

and at the same time enjoy the whole thing as if it were the most glorious fun. If he had been asked to describe himself in a phrase he might have called himself a 'frivolous fanatic,' and he might have gone on to explain that fanatics were the only beings except the angels who had any right to be frivolous. There was certainly a strain of angelic frivolity in Chesterton's genius that enabled even those who quarrelled with his arguments to think of him with affection and delights.

If it had not been for this strain of angelic frivolity, it is possible that he might have become one of the greatest pessimists of his age. For, ever since his early years, he saw the world under the control of the powers of darkness—first, Imperialists, South African millionaires, Puritans and *fin-de-siècle* writers and artists, and, later on, birth-controllers, party politicians, collectivists, psycho - analysts, and enemies of the Catholic Church. He saw the tide of modernism pouring in, and himself, like a twentieth - century Canute, hopelessly **unable** to stop it with the magic of words. Yet, even in his helplessness, he went on laughing and asserting that the world is a jolly **place**. He was the only man of his age who

could call a thing 'jolly' and make you feel that 'jolly' was a living word that really meant something. He would probably have attributed this to the fact that he believed in God and that he believed in the ordinary man, and have argued that, even in a world controlled by birth-controllers and reformed by divorce-law-reformers, a man who can still retain his faith both in divinity and in humanity-has the best possible grounds for optimism. What he once wrote of Browning might have been written of himself: 'He is called an optimist; but the word suggests a calculated contentment which was not in the least one of his vices. What he really was was a romantic. . . . He did not explain evil, far less explain it away: he enjoyed defying it. He was a troubadour even in theology and metaphysics. . . . He may be said to have serenaded heaven with a guitar.'

Chesterton, in his appreciation of the glory and joy of life in a world perpetually harried by the devil, saw a divine beauty even in King's Cross Station. He believed in the existence of hell, but that did not prevent him from celebrating the beauty of asparagus in the mouths of mortals. He gloried in the

achievements of the saints and martyrs, but he also shared the wild raptures of the schoolboy immersed in a penny dreadful. There was never a Pagan Greek who regarded the pleasures of life with a benigner eye. There were critics who occasionally when they were exasperated with Chesterton maintained that his joviality, his hilarity, was forced. No one who ever heard him laugh could believe this. I have been at a dull enough banquet at which a speaker made a mild enough joke, and have seen all the tables set on a roar not by the joke itself, but by the peculiar 'hing-hing-hing' of Chesterton's laughter at it, increasing in volume and rising and falling as the rest of the diners joined in. Chesterton could have made any banquet a success by the infectiousness and magnificent appreciativeness of his laughter. It was difficult to hear it and not, for the moment, to feel that life was worth living.

The truth is, Chesterton was in all things the most natural of men. If any one else had appeared in his wide-brimmed hat, his flowing cape, and with his untidy flood of hair, he would have been suspected of posing. But one could almost believe that Nature herself chose Chesterton's clothes for him, as she chose his

equally original features. Even the enormous Spanish knife that he carried about with him to sharpen his pencils was just such a knife as seemed most natural to use for the purpose. Once, when engaged in a debate on Socialism in a Dublin theatre, Chesterton wished to make a note while his opponent was speaking. Finding that his stub of pencil needed sharpening, he produced his lethal weapon on the platform and began slowly sharpening the pencil. At sight of the knife, the audience went into such prolonged fits of laughter that the Socialist speaker was unable to continue for some minutes. Everybody in the hall thought that the production of the knife was one of Chesterton's jokes. But it was not. It was as natural to him as taking a hansom or, later on, a taxi. And heaven knows that was natural enough to him. While he lived in London he was the most notorious cab-user of his age. And he did not use cabs like you and me, merely for purposes of transportation. He believed that cabs were meant, not merely for travelling in, but to be kept waiting outside. It used to be told of him that when he was in need of money, he would take a hansom from Battersea to some Fleet Street office that owed him for an article

and, bidding the cabby wait for him, would go in to see the cashier. Having drawn his money, he would drop into a fellow-journalist's room, sit down, and begin talking. In the course of conversation he would forget all about the cab with the fare mounting up, and, having spent a happy hour, would say good-bye to his friend, only to fall in with another acquaintance on the stairs. More talk, more laughter, more forgetfulness of the cab outside. And so it would go on, according to the legend, till, when he arrived home at Battersea, he found that the fare had mounted so high that, after paying it, he had only a few shillings left of the money he had taken so much time and trouble to collect. The legend may be an exaggeration, but it suggests something of the unworldly extravagance of Chesterton's nature.

This extravagance appears in his writing—extravagance of vision, extravagance of words. Everything that he wrote—fiction, history, biography, criticism, theology, political pamphlets, drama, essays—might be described as an extravaganza. He did not see London connected with heaven by a ladder, like Francis Thompson: he saw pieces of London and of heaven all mixed up together like the parts of an unsolved

jig-saw puzzle, and he spent his life solving the puzzle section by section to his own great delight and to the exhilaration of his century.

The literary form that came to him most naturally, perhaps, was the essay. He himself denied that he was an essayist; he said that what he wrote were articles. But here he made a false distinction, I think. He believed that he was too pugnacious and controversial to be called an essayist. The best reply to this is that while, as a rule, the essayists have been neither fiercely pugnacious nor controversial, Chesterton brought pugnacity and controversy into the essay and gave them as personal and imaginative an expression as Addison gave to his social sallies or Lamb to his confessions. Chesterton, indeed, seems to me, in one sense of the word, never to have written—in prose—anything except essays. He once compared the essayist to the nobleman's son of Mr Wodehouse's invention who, on being appealed to by his father to behave if possible like a sane and rational human being, replied with a solemn fervour: 'I 'll have a jolly good stab at it, governor.' Chesterton himself, whatever he took in hand, always seemed to be having 'a jolly good stab at it.' His genius was of the

hit-or-miss order—jokes that deserve to be immortal mixed up with jokes that are a crackle of words, images that are no more illuminating than back-garden fireworks mingled with arguments that seem to give light to truth as a sunrise gives light to the world. His genius was at once that of the journalist and that of the man of letters. He was a rhetorician with imagination—a writer who, at his most inspired, may be said to have thought in images. The religious and political ideals for which he fought may wax or wane, but he, at least, is certain to be remembered as one who fought for them with the most inspired originality and who, in so doing, helped to increase not only the humanity but the festivity of his age.

